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MARGARET

AND HER BRIDESMAIDS,

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "QUEEN OF THE COUNTY."

Mrs. J. C. Stretton

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MARGARET

AND

HER BRIDESMAIDS.

CHAPTER I.

In a small room, furnished so as to indicate its purport, — a study, — sat four girls. One, placed rather apart from the others, occupied herself in some fancy-work, denoting by this, as well as by her age and appearance, that she was no longer a school-girl; neither could she be mistaken for a governess. Her rich dress and air rather pointed her out as a parlor-boarder among those who were diligently occupied in painting and drawing.

A large, fair, indolent-looking girl was employed in copying the picture of a chubby, smiling baby, while her neighbor, a dark-haired, bright-looking picture of a regular school-girl, strove in vain to impart a beautiful curl to the mustache of a knight. Her pencil was obstinate, and evidently possessed of a commonplace mind, for nothing could induce it, guided by fingers ever so willing, to perform such "a love of a mustache" as the original from which it was copying.

In somewhat scornful distance from these two, sat a girl of eighteen, painting flowers. Now and then they tittered and laughed together, in a subdued tone, as if indulging in some jest at the expense of the flower-painter, who, erect and disdainful, showed no other symptom of annoyance than a slight dilating of her nostril, and a curl of the lip, that approached a sneer too nearly not to mar her Saxon beauty.

The graceful worker by the fire would raise her serene pure eyes to the school-girl scoffers, now and then, when they ventured a thought too far for politeness, and they would subdue their voices, as if in answer to the appeal. Through the crevices of large folding doors came the hum and murmur of a busy school, which opening now, filled the smaller room with sound, until the new comer shut the door.

A little, slight, childish thing, with thick, rich curls in high confusion all over her head, proceeded to pour a quantity of counters, or good marks, into a little drawer in a bureau.

"Ah! Lotty," said the worker, "have you really gained all those?"

"Where is Margaret?" answered Lotty, quickly, and looking from one to the other, with large, dark eyes of extraordinary intelligence and beauty.

"She is here," said a soft voice, at the small door of the apartment.

They all exclaimed in various keys and phrases; but Margaret's face told a tale that hushed them.

They had parted from her the evening before, a gay school-girl, as thoughtless and merry as themselves.

But some extraordinary change had taken place. Margaret was blushing, confused, her eyes veiled, her voice tremulous as she said, in answer to their queries as to what had delayed her so long, —

"I have been engaged, I mean I am engaged; I have only come for a few moments, I am going — that is, I wished to tell you myself, I am going to be married!"

"Law! my dear!" exclaimed Florence, the mustache attempter.

"How nice!" drawled Caroline, the baby delineator.

"God bless my Margaret!" said Millicent, the worker.

"How very strange!" murmured the scornful Augusta.

"*No!*" came from the little compressed, angry lips of Lotty.

"And mamma," continued the blushing bride elect, "permits me to come and ask you, I mean she would be glad — and you know that I shall be so also; O! so happy, so pleased, if you will all be my bridesmaids."

"I shall be delighted, my love," cried Florence.

"How very nice!" exclaimed Caroline, with alacrity.

"With heartfelt pleasure, sweet Meg," whispered Millicent.

"If it is soon," said Augusta, sententiously, "I shall be happy to oblige you."

A most strenuous and indignant "Never!" burst from the lips of the little Lotty, as she fled from the room.

Then they all left their several occupations, and, in utter defiance of school hours and manners, they crowded round the blushing Margaret.

She had taken shelter at this important era of her life in the loving arms of Milly, her eyes glancing up but once, as the little, impetuous Lotty left the room; then, the irrepressible smile of a new gladness born in a fine and sensitive heart, broke in dimples round her mouth, telling that tale the eyes hoped to conceal.

"What shall you be married in, dear?" said Caroline.

"And how will the bridesmaids be dressed?" asked Florence, anxiously.

"Shall you be married in church, or by special license in the drawing-room? the latter is so nice, and no trouble," said Caroline.

"Don't have a bonnet, if you love me, but be covered with a veil from head to foot," cried Florence. "And also other flowers are worn in the bridal wreath now, besides orange blossoms, which I think a blessing."

"A blessing on my Margaret," whispered Milly's gentle voice.

"But, my dear, who is the happy man?" said Augusta. "And may I beg you to be early in naming the day, otherwise I know not if I can officiate as bridesmaid."

"Pray, why not?" asked Florence, mockingly.

"I may be a bride myself," answered Augusta, haughtily. "My marriage is likely to take place within a few months."

"To whom, I wonder!" exclaimed the two girls sarcastically. "Is it the old postman, or the policeman round the corner?"

"For shame!" retorted Augusta; "you judge of me by yourselves; a pair of hoiden school-girls, who cannot see when a gentleman shows his preference by the delicate attentions of a gentleman. I allude to Sir Harold Leigh."

"Who?" said Margaret, raising herself from Millicent's arms; "ah, no, Augusta!"

"Wherefore not, my dear? Do you think no one has a lover but yourself?"

Margaret placed her hand on Augusta's mouth.

"Hush!" she said, "he is here, he is with mamma, he is my Harold, I am his Margaret."

And at this avowal the fair face grew crimson with blushes, and was fain to hide itself in Milly's redundant curls. Augusta tried to laugh off her mistake with ill-concealed dismay, but the other girls were too happy in the prospects of a wedding and all its fun, to laugh at her as unmercifully as she deserved, so that she soon recovered her usual composure and assurance.

Besides, they all loved Margaret so well, her happiness absorbed all other feelings.

Caroline loved her, because she was so unselfish and generous, — virtues in which she did not shine herself.

Florence, because Margaret was so simple and ingenuous, not able to say what she did not think (a quality quite out of Miss Florence's way, by the by).

Augusta loved her, or rather liked her, because Margaret was rich and well-born, and freely imparted the advantages of the first quality to those who required them.

Millicent, because she saw in Margaret a pure and loving heart like her own, within the pious depths of which none knew the strength and power that would come forth.

Lotty loved her — but Lotty is a wilful little thing, and it is hardly possible to say whom she loved, or why she loved. One thing alone was certain; when Lotty loved, it was no half measures — her heart and soul were alike involved. But the unusual commotion in the inner school-room had made itself known through the folding doors, and Miss Elton, the head governess, appeared.

Millicent divulged the happy tidings: Margaret was kissed and congratulated, a holiday given on the spot to the whole school, upon her whispered request, and, after asking for Millicent and Lotty to remain the day and evening with her, Margaret departed.

A strange, fluttering sensation filled her heart, as she passed through the garden, and heard the merry laughter and joyous glee of her schoolmates.

She felt happy, but it was an awe-struck happiness, that made her think the world too small to contain such feelings, and only in the pure and lofty firmament of heaven could she find space sufficient for the love and gratitude welling from her heart. It seemed to her as if a new sun, a fairer sky, a more brilliant world was placed before her; and yet she had done nothing, had no claim to make for such gifts. Therefore they might fade; to-morrow they might be gone — leaving behind that gray cloud of blight and disappointment, consequent upon such a flood of light and happiness. As she placed her hand upon her heart, to still its tumultuous beating, and that one dread feeling, "could all this be real?" she heard a faint sob, which came from behind a tree.

"My little Lotty!" exclaimed Margaret, springing to her school-fellow's side.

"Why do you wish to marry?" murmured Lotty, turning her wet face from Margaret's kisses.

"Because, because ——" began Margaret.

"Was not I your husband?" interrupted Lotty, impetuously; "and have not I always been your little fond, foolish husband, ever since I came to school?"

"Yes, my Lotty, and so you shall always be my little school-husband."

"Then why do you want another? I have always been a very kind, good husband; mended all your pens, done all your sums, run all your messages, and would have told fibs for you."

"That last was quite unnecessary, you know, little Lotty ——"

"Don't joke with me, I cannot bear it. But who is he? I don't mind your marrying one person that I know of, and if it is him I won't fret any more, for it is very fatiguing."

Margaret could only whisper the name.

Lotty exclaimed loudly.

"O, hush, Lotty!" besought Margaret.

"I thought that man was making love to Augusta."

"And so did poor Augusta herself," said Margaret, her eyes drooping.

"However," said Lotty, brightening up, "I always told her the truth, that he really did not care for her one straw, but admired you more, and I was right."

"Poor Augusta!" murmured Margaret, her new sun, bright world, and happy feelings beginning to fade.

"Not at all," said Lotty; "she made the most love, and besides he has shown his good taste, though he is not the right man, mind, Margaret, so I never will give my consent. He is a good judge of a horse, though; Lucifer, the steeple-chaser, belongs to him; I should like to ride that horse, Queen Meg."

"Nonsense, Lotty!"

"Why say 'nonsense,' Margaret? I will try and reconcile myself to the marriage, if you will ask Sir Harold to let me ride Lucifer sometimes."

"He may consent, but I shall not, Lotty."

"Supposing he were to throw me, which no horse ever did yet, Margaret, you won't care; you will be thinking of your lov——"

"Hush, you naughty Lotty; why should I love you less?"

"I might have guessed what was going to happen, if I had had the sense of a mouse, and then I could have warned you, Margaret."

"Against what, Lotty?"

"Marrying Sir Harold Leigh. I know some one who loves you much better ——"

"Lotty, Lotty!"

"And so this is the reason we have been asked so often to your house, this half year, and Sir Harold always there; and thus it comes you like to talk of horses and dogs, and I, like a goose, listening to it all so unsuspiciously. I don't deserve to be Charlotte Beauvilliers."

CHAPTER II.

MARGARET was the only child left to her parents out of many, and had been born in their old age as it were.

Some of their children had married and left descendants, but the affection they had bestowed alike on son and daughter was now wholly concentrated on the blooming girl of eighteen. Not even his fine sturdy grandsons (all that remained to him of his first-born son) could rival, in old Sir Thomas's eyes, the shadow of his daughter's form; while "Margaret, my Margaret, sweet Margaret," formed the pith of all Lady Montagu's conversation.

To lose nothing of her sweet company, they had for the last five years lived in Bath, where Margaret could have the advantage of masters and companions of her own age. They were so unselfish in their love, they would not tie her merry spirit down to their aged fireside, but lovingly said to each other, "What have we now to live for, but to make Margaret happy?"

In the merry companionship of her schoolmates, the gentle, quiet home of her parents, Margaret had grown up, the simplest, most innocent-hearted girl, as she was almost the prettiest and best. She had but just experienced her first sorrow, namely, that she was to leave school, and part with her girlhood's friends, unknowing if they might meet again, when she made that abrupt entry into the school-room, with the announcement that was almost as startling to her as to them. In their daily school walks the girls were aware (as what girls are not?) that they attracted much attention.

Some were keenly alive to it, as Augusta, Florence, and Caroline; others scarcely noticed it, as Margaret and Millicent; again, little turbulent spirits like Lotty's were indignant at such implied rudeness.

Certainly, the little jealous school-husband had cause for being irate. No sooner did the school emerge from the house-door, all bonneted and shawled, escorted by, and under the strict surveillance of, the English and French governesses, than the handsomest man in Bath came curveting down the street on the most beautiful horse in the town.

Slowly, at a funereal pace, went the well-trained steed, by the long two-and-two line; the rider's eyes generally riveted, as Lotty indignantly declared, on Margaret; as Augusta exultingly believed, on herself. The gaze (if she caught it) but deepened the bloom on Margaret's cheek; but she was too much engaged to attend to it. This was her time for telling stories to the little girls, and at present the tale was most alarmingly interesting, and was duly repeated at night by the one favored little maiden, who heard it from the fountain's head, to the others, when supposed to be innocently sleeping.

Sir Harold might have been satisfied had he been able to gain as much of Margaret's attention as he did of Augusta's. But after six weeks' gazing, he found he made no advance, so he contrived an introduction to Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu.

There he certainly was in the same room with the lovely face which had so riveted his attention as to make him forget hunting, racing, and steeple-chasing, and all other sports so dear to his heart. But he did not make much way.

In fact, being an experienced man of the world, having been courted, flattered, spoiled, and made much of, he could not understand the shy, sensitive heart, that belonged to the prettiest face he had ever seen.

One evening, after devoting a whole hour to entertaining Margaret with stories of his horses and dogs, and seeing, with pleasure, how her shy eyes began furtively to glance up into his, with evident interest; how they rested for full ten seconds on his face, giving him time to see how dark and soft they were, when he told of his favorite horse's love for him; how the half smile was beginning to break into irrepressible dimples, and the rosy lips to give glimpses of the little white teeth within, he was wholly unprepared for the unrestrained look of delight with which she sprang from this most interesting conversation to greet her school-fellows.

They had been invited to tea that evening: and as the stately Augusta swam into the seat Margaret had so willingly vacated, he pished and pshawed himself into a vile humor, and determined to be revenged. So he devoted himself entirely to Augusta; and when he glanced round now and then, to see if the lesson were taking effect, his state of mind was not improved by discovering that nobody seemed to be caring in the least how he and Augusta were amusing themselves.

Lotty, Milly, Carry, and Flo., were all in high glee, and Margaret the merriest among them; but there was a glow on her cheek, and a light in her eyes, which made Harold fancy that, without knowing it, she was happy in his evident attentions.

Notwithstanding, she did not seem the least affected by his flirtation with Augusta.

He overheard her telling them about his horse, and was sensible of such a pleasurable emotion thereat, that he did not heed Augusta in the very middle of a sentimental harangue, and her evident discomposure became apparent to Carry and Flo., much to the gratification of those two worthy young ladies.

As he went away, Margaret raised her fawn's eyes and said, in a low, shy voice, —

"Will you ride that horse when you pass us again?"

"With great pleasure," he answered, in nearly as low a voice; but his heart bounded, and he was glad to rush out into the street, and then away into the fields, under the broad moonlight, to give some scope to his joy.

"To think, after having passed unscathed through all the courts of Europe, that I should at last be caught by a simple school-girl. She is so fresh, so shy, so natural! what soft loving glances she gives her father and mother! she must be mine! I am too impatient to wait longer. Besides, if I do not provide myself with a decisive impediment, in the shape of a wife, Augusta Clare will marry me by force. Nevertheless, if I speak to Margaret, I know I shall undo the work of the last six weeks; her shy nature will prompt her to reject me at once. I will call on Sir Thomas to-morrow, and state all my wishes and intentions; and I will ask his consent to visit them constantly, with the avowed intention of making myself acceptable to his sweet daughter. I knew I was not mistaken the first time I saw her walking; such a lovely figure, such a perfect walker, so light and elegant, yet so firm and dignified! I admired the walk for a whole week before I saw the face, and when she becomes frank and open with me, as she is with her father and mother, and when I am permitted to excite and join in the happy gladness of her spirit, how like a sunbeam she will prove! Ah! how she will brighten up our dull, stately home, where my mother rules at present, with Prudence and Propriety, as I call my two sisters. And my mother, she must be pleased with her!

for who could resist sweet Margaret? while Pru. and Pro. will learn to look upon her as a stray star, wandering there solely to enliven and shine upon them. I believe the dulness of home has hitherto alarmed me with regard to matrimony, devoutly as my mother has wished for such an event. I shall certainly speak to Sir Thomas to-morrow. Her eyes are like brown velvet, and all her movements the perfection of lady-like grace. Sweet Margaret! I could never be unhappy with you."

CHAPTER III.

Harold fulfilled his over-night intentions. Now, it cannot be denied that Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu were more grieved than pleased at his communication, albeit that the matter was so flattering to their Margaret.

"She is so young," pleaded the father.

"She is our only one," murmured the mother.

"We hoped to keep her always," said Sir Thomas.

"We cannot expect to live much longer," sighed Lady Montagu.

Harold was sensibly affected. Notwithstanding a very good heart, he was unaccustomed to consult any other wishes than his own; and he did not see why, because they were so alive to the merits of their Margaret, they should insist upon keeping such a charming girl all to themselves.

"I grant she is very young," said Harold; "but I dare say it will be six months and more before she will permit me to be sufficiently intimate to begin to make love, much less tell her so. Though I have now seen her every day for six weeks, I have never even shaken hands with her, and she never voluntarily spoke to me until last night."

"True, very true," said Sir Thomas; "our Margaret is very shy."

"She is very timid, I know, in some things," said Lady Montagu.

"All I wish to do now, is to gain your permission to try and win her affections. Knowing how my feelings were warming towards her, I could not visit at your house without informing you of my hopes and intentions," said Harold.

"Very honorable, indeed, I must say," said Sir Thomas. "My dear Anne, Sir Harold is a man of honor."

"Indeed he is, and we ought to be grateful, I am sure," said Lady Montagu, looking just the contrary. "He comes of a very good family, Sir Thomas, I know, for your mother I remember very well, Sir Harold; she was lady-in-waiting to good Queen Charlotte, and amid all the state and reserve of that court, she ever bore the palm of the most dignified and discreet."

Harold bowed at this praise of his mother, while he mentally said, "No wonder my mother is so stiff and stately, and Leigh Court so dull and precise. If I succeed in gaining her affections, I do not see why you should not come and live near us," he continued, aloud.

"Dear, dear," said Lady Montagu, "you are too quick, you anticipate too much, Sir Harold. Margaret may not, perhaps, like you," continued she, brightening up.

Harold smiled; certainly a smile of self-satisfied import; nevertheless, he replied, "Perhaps not."

"Well, well," said Sir Thomas, "now let us drop the subject, it makes me nervous and fretful. But you are an honorable young man, Sir Harold, and we ought to be obliged to you, though we do not exactly feel so."

"Then I may visit the house, and try to win Miss Montagu's heart, if I can?" said Harold.

"Yes, I suppose so. I suppose we must not stand in her light; we must let her judge for herself, poor pet; but I hope you may think better of it. I truly hope you may see another face that you like better than our Margaret's."

So Sir Harold took his leave, none the less anxious to obtain the dear Margaret from the difficulty there seemed to be about it.

"My dear Anne," said Sir Thomas, after their visitor had departed, "I will tell you what we will do. We must ask all Margaret's prettiest school-fellows here; you must find out all the belles of Bath, and on the evenings that Sir Harold is here, we will surround him with such pretty faces, that he will not see our sunny Margaret, the light of our old age."

"A very good idea, Sir Thomas, and I will also renew my acquaintance with Lady Katherine; she may not, perhaps, like the connection; our Margaret may be too simple and natural for such a grand lady, and she may forbid the marriage. I have always heard that her son was very dutiful, and she, I know, carries duty, etiquette, and propriety to the extreme verge, and has always kept her children in full order."

"It seems to me, Anne, that we are becoming two selfish, hypocritical people in our old age; but if we lose our Margaret, I think our business in this world is well nigh over."

"I shall feel as if it were, I am sure," said Lady Montagu, her tears falling; "nevertheless, we will bear everything, so that sweet Meg is happy. We will hope that she loves her old father and mother too fondly to wish to leave them so soon. I will always ask that pretty Miss Clare here with her; she seems greatly taken with Sir Harold, and is, in manners and appearance, much more fitted for a great lady than our Margaret."

Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu were simple-minded, good, kind people. They thought themselves very treacherous and hypocritical, inviting all the prettiest girls in the neighborhood to meet the wolf that had come to steal their lamb, and yet it never occurred to them that they had a much surer way of keeping their Margaret than the means they now employed. They had but to say, or even do no more than imply, that they hoped, while their little span of life lasted, that she would remain with them, and the warm, sensitive heart would have responded instantly. All the lovers in Christendom, were they handsomer than Adonis, and more amiable and devoted than the knights of old, could not have obtained entrance to Margaret's heart, with her parents' wishes to guard the door.

But they had never allowed her to know how necessary she was to their happiness; in their unselfish love, they had ever placed her little pleasures and wishes as completely separated from theirs; yet, at the same time, were so anxious that she should enjoy them. Margaret, if she ever thought on the subject, might have imagined they considered her a grandchild rather than a daughter.

Once or twice circumstances had so occurred as to make Margaret think, "How sorry mamma must be that I am so young, and that I was not born about the same time as my other sisters." She was so simple, modest, and humble, that it never entered her innocent mind she was the cynosure of any circle, and with such natures it is not difficult to believe, that when once they are aware of the fact, once they feel the value of their love to another, death alone can extinguish the feeling thus awakened, the grave only do away with these first impressions.

It was so with Margaret. By degrees she became aware that she was an object of interest to another; she, who thought it so good of everybody to love her; so kind of her father to let her kneel by his chair, and play with his white curls; so good of her mother to allow her to fly over the house on all sorts of messages.

At first, she confided to her school-husband that it would be very nice if Sir Harold was her brother, then he could call her Margaret, without saying that formal Miss Montagu."

"And I suppose you would call him Harold?" said the little fiery school-husband.

"Yes, of course," said Margaret; "Harold, not Sir Harold; it sounds very nice, does it not, Lotty?"

"No, it sounds very forward and Augustaish of you, and I won't allow you to do it."

"O, no," said Margaret, "not for the world — how could you think I would do it?"

So thus it came to pass that the experienced man of the world gained his end, against the simple, unworldly-wise old couple; and thus it came to pass that Margaret uttered the memorable speech, half hidden by the school-room door; and also thus it happened, Miss Augusta Clare had a little method in her madness, when she promulgated the fact that she intended to marry Sir Harold herself. She had met him quite as often as Margaret, according to old Sir Thomas's base arrangement, and she had talked to him a great deal more.

For whereas Margaret was very shy, retiring, and difficult of access, Augusta took an ell for every one of Sir Harold's inches, and made the most of *them*.

CHAPTER IV.

So Margaret accepted Sir Harold, and the wedding-day was fixed, she all unknowing of the blank that now fell on her aged parents' existence, while they, as heretofore, studiously concealed from her anything but their warm interest in her happiness, and seemed to take such a pride and delight in her trousseau, carriages, horses, and bridesmaids, that Margaret could only say to herself, "They will be so happy together, now they have no wild girl to trouble them; and I hope my Harold and I may be like them when we grow old."

Nothing could exceed the stately condescension with which Lady Katherine Leigh received her intended daughter-in-law;

and the pale Pru. absolutely kissed the bright girl with fervor, while the meek, quiet Pro. became quite flushed and animated on hearing they were to be bridesmaids.

Although of an antique age compared to Margaret, being some years older even than their brother, Pru. and Pro. (whose real names were Charlotte and Georgina, in reverential memory of the Court, wherein Lady Katherine shone so conspicuously), were still considered young girls by their courtly mamma.

They always walked behind her like two model maids of honor, attendant on a despotic sovereign; they courtesied on leaving her gracious presence, they asked permission to take the air, and even to the color of their dresses and ribbons all was deferred to their mother. Pru. had once indulged in a little flight of emancipation, which led to the discovery that she had absolutely been seen speaking, upon several occasions, to the curate.

Urged by incipient love, Pru. feebly chirped forth that "he was a very good young man." The shade of Queen Charlotte rose before the indignant mother, but history does not say how Pru. was brought to reason. Doubtless the way was stringent, for the cure was effectual; Pru. and Pro. were never seen to speak voluntarily after that to any man under eighty years of age.

Sir Harold was very generous. He presented each bridesmaid with her dress complete, and a turquoise ring; but Lotty was firm in her determination not to be one of these favored mortals, which Florence and Caroline, with more candor than politeness, told her was a very good thing, as there would have been an odd bridesmaid; now the numbers were even.

"I don't care how odd I am," said Lotty, taking the matter literally.

Neither the policeman nor the postman having proposed, as Florence and Caroline maliciously hinted, Augusta was able to officiate as bridesmaid. The two former were so far justified in their unladylike remarks, that Augusta's cupidity, in the way of admiration, made her swallow anything from anybody that fed her vanity. She was a beautiful girl, very fair, with sunny hair flowing in thick curls over cheeks quite rivalling the peach in bloom. A fine, tall figure, rounded in proportion, with the utmost grace; and a bewitching, sweet, taking manner, that would beguile a weak man of his heart at first sight. Her eyes were peculiarly beautiful, the lids so white and full: the eyelashes almost black, and the orbs themselves of a clear blue.

Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu might well have hoped that a being so gifted by Nature would prove more attractive than their simple, pretty Margaret. But a true man of the world will only give his heart into Nature's keeping. He laughs, talks, sentimentalizes with girls like Augusta; his heart he places in the keeping of a loving, simple nature like Margaret's.

So the wedding-day came, and Lotty agreed she would take care of Sir Thomas while the others were at church.

"He and I do not approve of the marriage," said Lotty with dignity; "though I allow Harold is not a bad fellow; he has promised me a son of Lucifer's, and he will be rising five about the time I leave school, which will be just the thing."

"Did one ever hear such language?" said Flo. to Carry, as they arranged each other's dresses.

Lady Montagu would fain have remained at home with her husband; her heart felt ill at ease, and only her utter forgetfulness of self made her attempt the exertion. She could not but think of the three daughters she had already seen married under the happiest auspices, and now they were no more. Was this to be the fate of the youngest, most gifted, most beloved?

"God's will be done!" she whispered to herself many times; and often she had to appeal to the same gracious help for strength to support this day, without the loved object of her unselfish affections perceiving on this, which ought to be the happiest day of her life, the sorrow they were suffering.

Poor Sir Thomas shook with suppressed emotion as the gentle, fair girl knelt for his blessing, before proceeding to the church, while she felt — as what bride has not? — that it was agony to leave her childhood's home for an untried affection, a new existence.

"If papa would but say, 'Stay, my child,' I could not, would not leave him," said she to herself.

But the good old man fondly kissed her, and exerting himself for her sake, that she might not see his grief and sorrow, he feebly made an attempt at cheerfulness, saying, —

"My darling will be Lady Leigh when I again see her."

Lotty, with tearful eyes, did her best to cheer his spirits, as the fair vision, white as marble, passed from his sight.

"Sir Harold loves her very much, no doubt," said she, "though no one can love her as we do, can they, Sir Thomas?"

"No! no! not as her fond old parents do."

"And I, Sir Thomas, too!" said Lotty, with a little acrimony; "but though Sir Harold is a very good fellow, I wish we had not let her marry so soon, because I know of a much better match for her."

"My dear what are you saying?" said the old man, who was beginning to think Lotty's mode of consolation none of the best.

"I think if Margaret had waited until Basil Erle had come home, he would have asked her to marry him. I don't know much about love-matters, but I am almost sure, when we were all staying with you last holidays, Basil was falling into downright love with Margaret; and you know what Basil is, such a fellow!"

"My dear boy!" said Sir Thomas, "I believe, indeed, there are few like him."

The old man, between grief, the tears that blinded his eyes, and Lotty's peculiar style of conversation, was becoming oblivious of the sex of his companion.

Lotty flushed up, and then continued in a softer voice, —

"Basil is just as good a man as Millicent is a woman, they are a worthy brother and sister; and though I am very young, Sir Thomas, not more than fifteen, I have seen a great deal of life, and of men, and I never saw any one like Basil. I don't like men in general, excepting the Beauvilliers; I think them stupid, egotistical fel—— creatures I mean; but if Margaret had waited to marry Basil, then she would have lived all her life close to you, and that would have been much better."

"Very, very true; but I never heard that Basil wanted our Margaret," said poor Sir Thomas.

"Well, he never did say so, more's the pity; he might have guessed before he went abroad that every man who ever saw Margaret would want to marry her. I am sure I should."

"And why did you not say so, my dear? for if you had, then perhaps you would not have minded living with us."

"No! I should have liked it of all things; but I should not have been good enough for Margaret; only Basil is."

"But when did he propose, my dear?"

"He never did, Sir Thomas, and that's the worst of it, and I know he will be dreadfully unhappy when he hears Margaret is married. Perhaps he will kill himself, though I think he is too sensible for that. But I will tell you how I know. I love Margaret better than any other woman in the world, I don't mind telling you, Sir Thomas."

"She deserves it, my dear boy! she deserves every one's love."

Lotty winced again, and again modulated her voice to a lady-like pitch.

"So, loving Margaret as I did, I soon saw who loved her besides; and I felt that my love was just a grain of sand to what Basil could give, and I dare say he would have told Margaret, but then she was a school-girl. Besides, you know what a bad character his father bears, and what a wretch Lady Erlscourt is, so I suppose he thought it wrong to take Margaret to such a house as that."

"But they could have lived with us, my dear, and Basil is such a good young man," sighed Sir Thomas.

"'Good' does not express what he is," returned Lotty; "but it is too late now; here they are all coming back from church."

"Well, God's will be done! I hope we have acted for the best," said Sir Thomas.

"We might have done better, I think," replied the sorry little comforter.

"What will Anne say! she is so fond of those two, Basil and Millicent; I doubt we have been too hasty, Margaret was too young, yes, too young to marry. I thought that, Anne. Anne, we were too hasty. Dear me, dear me!" And the poor old man sobbed aloud.

"For goodness' sake, don't do that!" exclaimed the alarmed Lotty, "they will think I have been beating you. And here is Lady Montagu being carried in as if she had fainted."

Startled out of his grief, Sir Thomas hurried out to meet the poor mother, and being both utterly unable to control their feelings longer, they fell sobbing into each others' arms.

Alarmed at this unwonted display, Margaret flew to them from her husband's arm.

"O mamma! papa! O mamma! papa!" was all she could say at first.

"I will not leave you. I cannot go. My own dear father and mother, bid your Margaret stay ever with you."

"O, hush, dear Meg," whispered Milly; "remember the vows you have just pronounced."

"But papa! mamma! my kind loving parents. Can this grief be for me? is it my loss they mourn thus? O Milly, I must not, cannot leave them."

"Remember, dearest, they may be overcome with the recollection of your sisters. See, Harold wonders at you. Let them grieve a little. Leave them to themselves, for none know what their loving hearts have suffered."

Lotty and Millicent led the afflicted parents into another room, while Harold drew Margaret aside, and whispered fond, endearing words to her, saying that now she was his, her word should be his law; and if she wished to stay with her parents, she should; she had only to name her wishes and he would consent.

Margaret raised the seldom-seen eyes to his face. In the one short glance he read the world of love she could bestow. The sensitive maiden heart opened to let the wife's devotion enter, and Harold knew that the grave alone could extinguish the love expressed in that glance. Proud and elated, he continued, as he folded her in his arms, "God forbid, my sweet wife, that my first act as a husband should be to take you from your parents: go, settle with them what you like; what pleases you will do the same by me."

But the constant habits of forbearance which they practised, shortly came to the aid of the fond father and mother.

Margaret was permitted to think that a tide of old recollections had overcome them, though she could not avoid seeing the extent to which they mourned for her.

It was agreed, that instead of going abroad, the bride and bridegroom should return in a short time to the old hall of her father, "Montagu House," and in looking forward to this speedy reunion, they were enabled to bid their darling "God speed:" while she left them in some degree comforted, more than all recollecting the kind and loving way in which her Harold had come forward, when he might have resented her first conjugal act. In her heart of hearts she promised him her life's devotions. We must trace her through it, and in the mean time wonder if, like Lotty, we shall say at the close of it,—

"Margaret was very foolish not to wait for Basil."

CHAPTER V.

I THINK we ought to learn who "Basil" and "Millicent" are.

On the borders of the New Forest in Hampshire rose the stately towers of Lord Erlscourt's castle.

The family were neither old nor particularly wealthy, so that the present lord did not disdain the appointment of Ranger of the Forest. He had married, early in life, a very beautiful and amiable woman of high rank and some wealth. During her lifetime the family were much loved and respected, and the embarrassed estates (left so by the present lord's predecessor), under her judicious sway were becoming free and unencumbered. Unfortunately for her husband and the estates, still more for her children, she died from the effects of a low, lingering fever, that often hangs about a densely wooded country. Either soured by her loss, or losing that restraint which her fine and noble character intuitively put upon one very much the reverse, Lord Erlscourt became a very different man.

He grew careless and indifferent about his habits and appearance. He became mixed up with a number of very questionable characters, and report was rife with tales of his midnight doings; when, instead of putting down the lawless poaching and glaring thefts of wood, he was described as head poacher and principal thief.

He consummated the ruin of his character as a gentleman and an honorable man, by marrying a handsome but vulgar girl, niece to one of his under officers, whose former life could by no means bear an inspection.

Elated by her unexpected rise in life, the new Lady Erlscourt added, to other disagreeable qualities, so much vanity and overweening pride, as to disgust even those of her own grade. With the low vulgarity of a small mind, and the vindictiveness of a very base one, she poured upon the heads of her unfortunate step-children so much mean and petty persecution, that Basil, the boy, ran away.

He was then about ten years old, and his little heart beat and swelled with indignation at the treatment both he and his gentle sister had borne; the bitter wrong caused him to reason and think with premature wisdom.

" I am very strong for my age," said the little fellow to himself, " and I know the wood paths in every direction. I shall go to-night as far as the hollow oak, and in the morning I will strike up to the left, and if I run as well as walk, I shall be at Montagu House by ten o'clock. I will tell Sir Thomas what we have to endure. I shall ask him to send for Milly. I shall refuse ever to return to my father's house unless she is released; then, if they will not let her come, I shall ask Sir Thomas to take me before a magistrate, and I will swear, swear solemnly by that great God who has made our own mother an angel in heaven, that we are starved, beaten, and ill treated, and Sir Thomas must write to grandpapa."

Thus soliloquizing, the little fellow ran with unabated energy and speed towards his intended resting-place. He felt no fear at passing the long night in the dark woods. He remembered nothing but his little sister's cries of agony at her step-mother's harsh treatment, and when he reached the old oak tree, he knelt upon the rustling bed of leaves at the foot, and prayed the Lord God of heaven to assist him in his designs, and whispered to himself, as he climbed up into his resting-place, "My dear angel mother will watch me while I sleep."

And he slept the sound sleep of the innocent; nevertheless the important step he was about to take seemed to move him in his sleep, for he awoke at the first faint streak of light that came stealing through the trees. Hastily descending (for he seemed to know intuitively that Lady Erlscourt would never let him escape, and that the knowledge of his flight would only make her the more determined to get him again into her power), he lost no time in pursuing his way. Every nerve braced by the fear of being captured, every instinct startled by the danger into forethought and judgment, with very few mistakes, the little fellow at last saw Montagu House before him.

Faint and exhausted, he made one last effort, and as he did so, he heard in the woods he had just left, the cracking of whips and shouting of men, which thrilled him with the knowledge that the pursuers were on his track.

The large window of the breakfast-room at Montagu House was wide open, and as Basil approached, he saw it was full of people.

"I am unable to say a word, I am so ill and faint, and those people will be here ere I can tell all, and I shall be taken back. O! mother, mother, why did you die and leave your poor children!"

At this moment he saw, not ten yards from him, a little girl, who was gazing at him with unbounded amazement. Basil sprang forward, and grasped her dress.

"Do you hear those people in the wood?" he gasped breathlessly. "And that noise? they are looking for me."

"Why do you run from them?" she answered.

"Because they beat and ill-used me, and I have run this morning many miles to tell Sir Thomas Montagu; but I am so tired and faint — they will be here before I can do so — will you hide me until they go?"

"Yes, yes," said the little girl, "come with me."

They ran together down a gravel walk which led to a conservatory, from thence a narrow staircase wound up to the highest story of the old-fashioned Elizabethan house.

Holding his hand fast, she darted into a large sort of empty lumber-room, and bidding him lock himself in, said, —

"I shall get you some milk."

"She ran down stairs again, locking the last door as well as she could, and entered the large open window just as the cavalcade of horsemen appeared upon the lawn.

There was no mistaking Sir Thomas Montagu's utter ignorance as to any fugitive having been seen near his house; besides, it was almost incredible that a boy of such tender age could have travelled so far without food or help. So that the party prepared to depart just as the little girl had collected her portion of breakfast, and was asking permission to eat it out of doors. This being granted, she but waited to see them fairly away, ere she tripped up first with a cup of milk.

Her prisoner had not locked the door, he was lying in a deep, exhausted faint on the floor.

"Mamma! mamma!" said the little fairy thing, as she flew down the house stairs; "come with me, I want you."

Her mother could not resist the earnest appeal.

"Don't tell papa yet, pray don't. I promised I would not, it is such a secret! Dear mamma! you must wait until he is well, that he may tell you everything himself."

In much amazement Lady Montagu listened to the talk of her little girl, and fairly cried out when she saw the beautiful, pale face of an apparently dead boy. Comprehending in a moment what her little girl only half understood, she lifted up the worn-out frame, and carrying it tenderly into her own room, she laid it on a bed. Then the fleet-footed little maiden ran hither and thither, according to her mother's directions, for restoratives, her excitement rendered double by the fact that it was her secret and hers only. She was standing eagerly watching her mother's face as she bathed the broad, fair brow, and poured the tiny restorative drops between the colorless lips.

A sigh, a shiver through the limbs. The large, beautiful eyes opened for a moment, and gazed on the kind face bending over him.

"Mother," he faintly said and smiled, and seemed to die away again.

But Lady Montagu redoubled her efforts, and again consciousness seemed to be restored. The eyes opened and looked inquiringly, first on her, and then fell on the little girl; a color flushed his face, he tried to stretch out his hand, but was too weak. But the lips opened, and with a smile of ineffable sweetness he half whispered, "Basil thanks you." And this was the first meeting of Margaret and Basil.

It is needless to say that as soon as Basil could tell his tale, Sir Thomas was quite ready to listen to it; and acted with so much judgment and discretion in the matter, that no alternative remained to the weak and reprehensible father but to yield up his children to their grandfather's care and protection. The conduct of Lady Erlscourt was so well known and notorious, that they were glad to hush the matter up any how.

And thus it fell out that the two poor, ill-used children came to have an honored and happy home, and received the education their rare and fine qualities deserved. And fortunately this time continued until Basil was nineteen, just two years before Margaret's marriage.

At that time their grandfather died, and then came a checkered and trying season, which served to prove that the spirit of the mother had fallen on the children, and that they were meant to bear the burdens of life with the lofty, firm faith of Christians.

CHAPTER VI.

Lotty, or rather Charlotte Beauvilliers, must not be passed cursorily over, as if a thing as small in importance as she was in person. Margaret's little school-husband was born of a peculiar people, and in a peculiar manner, as befits a heroine.

The Beauvilliers were a race of strong, sturdy Britons; true hearts of oak dwelt in their fine, athletic frames; and as is often the case, under gigantic proportions simple and kind hearts are to be found, so it was with them. Fearless, guileless, frank, and ingenuous, no one ever heard that a Beauvilliers did an action of which he was ashamed. Perhaps no great intellect was to be found among them, but warm-hearted, generous deeds followed their steps. And for no virtue were they more conspicuous than for family love. Brothers dwelt side by side, and seemed to love each other more, the closer they lived together. Large families were brought up in love and amity; none ever heard a Beauvilliers use a harsh word or say an unkind thing. A jovial, hilarious, vigorous race, they bound themselves to the country and soil, eschewing towns and professions, as something of another sphere than theirs.

Those who were rich enough, hunted, shot, and fished; those who were not, farmed, dug, delved, and planted; none were absolutely poor, and none were more than commonly rich. They had no expensive wants, but were generally remarkable for their simple tastes.

One other peculiarity existed in the race of Beauvilliers, the preponderance of males in the family; a girl was now and then born, but they were so scarce, that they were considered as sorts of natural curiosities, and treated accordingly.

About fifty years before our story commences, one Beauvilliers, larger, taller, stronger than the rest, with an extra portion of bonhommie and kindness, had been made, through these gifts, a sort of head of the family; he rejoiced in six sons. When he died, the eldest of these was worthily appointed to fill his place, being the true scion of his fine, old, jovial father; and he had six sons, all true Beauvillians. The youngest of these, at the age of eight years, was found thrashing a boy twice his size, for ill-treating a little girl; and he was brought into the parlor, flushed with excitement, and covered with blood and glory.

"Really," said his mother, "I think it is full time Norman went to school."

"He is our youngest, Belle," said the father. "Let us keep him with us a little longer, to warm our old hearts; we might get rusty and cold, wife, with no boys to trouble us."

"I have some idea he will not be the youngest long," said Mrs. Beauvilliers, with a rising flush on her cheeks.

"What now, Belle! more boys coming?" exclaimed the jovial father. "That's capital! I never heard better news in my life; what will Ned, Will, and Charlie say? Seven boys! why, I shall outdo my father. I always thought there never was a woman in this world like you, Belle, and I think so to this minute. Odds me! but I must write the news off, and invite them all to the christening."

"No, no, my dear husband, have compassion on me; remember, 'there is many a slip between the cup and the lip,' and don't get a christening dinner ready till you have a child to christen. Pray think how long it is since such an event occurred here, and that I am very nearly as much surprised as you are."

Mrs. Beauvilliers was a clever, talented woman; she had just the sort of calm, excellent good sense, which it was desirable to graft on the stock of the kind-hearted, though somewhat heedless, Beauvillians. Throughout the whole clan she reigned preeminent in worth and talents, and received a sort of feudal adoration from the simple-hearted race.

Mr. Beauvilliers could not forbear letting out the secret of his expected blessing, to all his brothers, each in strict confidence; and, therefore, they were all prepared with rounds of congratulations and hearty good wishes on the happy advent.

But all the five uncles, all the six little expectant brothers, all the cousins, nephews, kinsmen of every degree, were thrown into a state of profound amazement.

The expected seventh boy proved a little, small girl!

As soon as they had recovered from the astounding fact, a regular commotion ensued among the clan of Beauvilliers. No two remained long in the same place; they hunted each other up far and near, merely to shake hands, and say, "We have got a girl!"

The fine old family mansion of Beau-court, where the wonderful event occurred, was besieged with every Beauvilliers that had ever been heard of: only to see the happy father, shake hands, and mutually say, "We have got a girl!"

At the christening (the like of which never had been seen before), the girl was handed round, as Newman Noggs hath it, "as if it were something to eat." Perhaps a pervading feeling of disappointment might have gone through the company, on perceiving that the baby girl was not at all unlike what some of the baby boys had been. "But smaller, O, yes! decidedly smaller," as some said, with confident satisfaction. Upon the whole, the affair went off admirably. When the girl was handed from one to another, it gazed from face to face with wise little eyes, which made everybody declare that the girl was the most sensible child that had ever been born.

When the holy water was dashed in its face, rather violently (as it was then beginning to be thought the proper thing to do), the girl neither started nor winced, but opened her eyes, and fixed them with a sort of questioning wonder on the clergyman. Whereupon everybody thought, "The girl is a true Beauvilliers, and does not know what fear is."

The amount of presents which it was esteemed necessary to bestow upon the girl, made her a little heiress on the spot.

She might have set up a shop of corals and bells only; she might have turned silversmith and dealt in silver mugs, tiny knives and forks, in red morocco and every other sort of case; she might have opened an account with her bankers, and put out her money at interest; she might have been smothered beneath the weight of gold chains and coral necklaces.

As for her nurse, she was looked upon as a peculiar person of the angel species, and came in for her share of presents, until she bent under the accumulation of gowns, shawls, and new guineas.

CHAPTER VII.

It became a sort of custom among the nearer relatives to make periodical journeys to Beau-court, to see how the girl was getting on; and as no one ever came empty-handed, her possessions were becoming vast.

As she grew older, the sort of notice and homage she received might have proved very injurious; but she had one Beauvillian peculiarity, an adoration of her mother.

Her word was law, her look a command; and being so talented and clever, the little girl reaped all the benefit of such an affection. Mrs. Beauvilliers became aware that her daughter was of a very peculiar character; and while she wondered how such a disposition would make its way in the world, she could not but admire the fearless, independent spirit, the extreme truthfulness of her words and actions; Lotty's word might be relied on as certainly as the sun travels from east to west.

Of course it must be allowed that her education was of a more manly description than befits a young lady. Each brother was anxious to impart some of his knowledge in the bold sports of the Beauvillians; each uncle inquired diligently after her progress in riding, leaping, and jumping; nevertheless they looked with reverence and delight upon all Mrs. Beauvilliers' feminine accomplishments; and when Lotty, escorted by her six brothers, brought down, on her father's birthday, a silk pocket-handkerchief hemmed by herself, the sensation it caused was wonderful.

"Here, papa, is my present; I hemmed it myself; mamma says it is pretty well done, and I have only been three weeks to-morrow doing it."

"Yes, papa, this is our Lotty's hemming," said one brother.

"Only three weeks to-morrow doing it," continued another.

"Look well at it, papa," exclaimed a third.

"Mamma says it's well done," said the fourth.

"No, only pretty well!" said the matter-of-fact Lotty.

Papa looked at it with an admiration and delight that quite satisfied the six brothers; then the handkerchief was put away, but upon the arrival of any fresh Beauvilliers, it was brought out, shown, and admired, and that Beauvilliers went away, and to the next Beauvilliers he met he told the news.

"Our girl has hemmed a handkerchief in three weeks, all but a day, and it is pretty well done."

Whereupon that Beauvilliers went to see it, until the whole clan had been favored with a view thereof.

Much to the detriment of the beloved little girl, after a short illness, Mrs. Beauvilliers died, just when her daughter was of the age when she would most want her cares and attention.

As she felt her end drawing near, she called for the little idolized being, now about twelve years old. Generally calm and self-possessed in a remarkable degree, Lotty was taken to her mother, convulsed with grief.

"Take me with you, mother! take me with you!" she rather screamed out than said. But that soft, low voice calmed her in a moment.

"God sees fit to separate us, my child; murmur not, but rather strive to obey his will, that we may meet again. Now, my Lotty, listen to your mother's last words; they need be but few to you, thank God: 'Know your duty, and do it.'"

"I will try, mamma; I promise."

"Then that is enough; and now remember, papa suffers a greater loss than you do. You must, instead of grieving, comfort him. That is your present duty."

"I will, mamma."

"I shall wish you to go to school, Lotty."

"O mamma!"

"I wish it, Lotty."

"I shall go, mamma."

"You will not forget, my child, that you are a woman — a lady. As the men of the Beauvilliers' race are strong and manly, so must the women show themselves gentle and feminine."

"I will try, mamma."

But the child's heart was older in its affections, deeper and stronger in its love, than even her mother knew.

A cold dew covered her, the room and the dying mother faded from her sight, her dark eyes, remarkable for their brilliant beauty, grew dull, and closed.

"I die with mamma," she thought, happily, kissing her passionately. The poor mother collected her remaining strength to fold the little senseless form in her fond embrace, and long before the broken-hearted Lotty recovered from her swoon, her mother's spirit was in heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIX months after this event, Lotty and her father were out on their daily ride.

It was the habit of the little girl on these occasions (though usually silent) to say, if she saw her father's head drooping with sorrowful recollections, or the tears gathering in his eyes, "Papa, do you think I can manage that hedge?" If he said, "Yes, Lotty," the spirited little rider, with her faultless pony, got over it somehow.

And in admiring his child's courage and skill, poor Mr. Beauvilliers would rouse himself for a little while.

When the head again drooped, again the little voice was heard, "Papa, in that meadow we can have a good gallop, with the brook to jump at the bottom."

So papa and the fearless little daughter proceeded to perform the feat, to the entire satisfaction of both.

It was thus that Lotty strove to remember her mother's last words, and fulfil her present duty. But, on this particular day, her voice was low and trembling, and she said, seeing her father more cheerful than usual, —

"Papa, I am to go to school."

Poor, little, magnanimous Lotty! School was to her, in imagination, the fearful gaol that the thief sees always before him, or the distant, banished land which the convict would almost prefer death to beholding.

"Ah! my Lotty, are you tired of your fond father?"

"No!" said Lotty, with energy.

So they trotted, side by side, for a mile or two, meeting now and then an admiring kinsman, who, briefly saluting the afflicted pair, would yet turn round and watch them with loving eyes, as long as they were in sight.

"Papa," said Lotty, "can I go to a school so near you that I may ride over to see you every day?"

"Ride, my pet! I never yet heard of a school where they allowed a girl to keep her pony," returned her father.

Such an appalling fact sent the blood straight from Lotty's face to her heart. That going to school should be a bar to riding, and cause a total separation between herself and those she most loved, well nigh overcame every restraint she had put upon herself, almost breaking open all those hidden sluices of grief that she had so carefully concealed from her father.

She was so absorbed that she did not perceive that her father was in nearly the same state as herself.

Giving her little spirited pony a touch of the whip, he reared, plunged, and kicked, causing Mr. Beauvilliers such alarm lest he should unseat his rider, that Lotty saw the fit of grief had passed by.

So she patted Midge on the neck, spoke to and coaxed him; but the little indignant fellow was not to be soothed in that way, after such unmerited treatment, and gave his little mistress and her father ample trouble before they finished their ride.

"I cannot think why he behaved in this way," said Mr. Beauvilliers, uneasily, scanning him over with his eyes.

"Papa, I touched him with the whip."

"How came you to do that, my Lotty; do you not know he will not bear it?"

"Yes, papa, I did it on purpose, because—because you know I *must* go to school" — and the little voice faltered.

"I know it, I know it, my child. Well, we will consult your uncles and brothers."

It is needless to say that all the Beauvilliers were consulted, and the matter ended in its being decided that Lotty should go to a school in Bath.

All the Beauvilliers that had a right, from near relationship, went to see the school, the governess, Lotty's future playmates, even her private individual bed. All the Beauvilliers that had not this privilege rode into Bath to look at the house outside.

Being a very clever, sensible woman, Miss Elton was rather amused than annoyed at these proceedings, and was a prey to a vast amount of curiosity to see the object of so much affection.

She imparted her feelings to Millicent Erle, her eldest pupil, and besought her kind aid to assist in reconciling, what she supposed would be, a spoiled darling to the trammels of school.

In compassion to the aged and apparently heart-broken father, Miss Elton had agreed that every Saturday Lotty was to go to Beau-court, see her father, and return to school on Monday.

"But how will she travel, sir? Beau-court must be twenty miles from here," said Miss Elton.

"She will ride," replied Mr. Beauvilliers.

"Ride!" exclaimed Miss Elton, "that child!"

"Yes," returned Mr. Beauvilliers, "she is used to it. I will send her pony and servant every Friday evening to the inn close by."

Miss Elton half repented accepting the charge of such a child, especially when, hearing the noise of a great cavalcade in the street, she looked out to see what was the matter, and with amazement beheld the equestrians stopping at her door. Accompanied by four brothers and three uncles was Lotty, a little, diminutive girl, on a spirited black pony, that did not seem a whit the less wicked though it had come twenty miles.

Her father had been too much overcome to bring her himself; so, to keep up her spirits, a large concourse of affectionate Beauvilliers had assembled to escort her on her way. Before reaching Bath, they had thought it prudent and proper to suffer her to go through the town with only a limited number, which was fortunate for Miss Elton. She little knew that about a dozen more Beauvilliers were sorrowfully wending their way home, after taking leave of their girl.

The four brothers and the three uncles were all kindly invited in.

"No, we thank you heartily. If we do, we shall never be able to leave her, so take her out of our sight as soon as may be."

Passionately kissing Norman, her youngest and favorite brother, who had leaped down to take her off her pony, Lotty ran into the house and disappeared from the sight of the loving Beauvilliers.

When they overtook the others, many were the anxious questions, "How she looked?" "What she said?" and "Did she bear the parting well?" They shook their heads mournfully at every fresh detail, and then they all disputed who was to lead Midge home.

"I, and I only," said Norman, "so catch us if you can."

And with an inspiriting view-halloo, away he went over hill and dale, and led the Beauvilliers such a chase, that they had no time for any dismals, but arrived at Beau-court in such elevated spirits, with so much to tell of the exciting gallop, that Mr. Beauvilliers was quite enlivened thereby.

CHAPTER IX.

MISS ELTON had amused herself in picturing to her mind what her new pupil would be like, and this was the ideal she formed.

A ruddy-faced chubby girl of substantial form, and Beauvillian stature, sweet-tempered, or she would not be so loved; somewhat spoiled or she would not have been spared to school. A trifle hoidenish, or the stress laid upon feminine associates would not have been so urgent.

She saw before her a little fair girl, looking quite a child in her riding gear. As she removed her hat she displayed eyes that amazed Miss Elton with their size and brilliancy, and before she could recover her astonishment, the little thing gathered up her habit, and passing her fingers through her thick, short curls, she swept them off her forehead, and approaching Miss Elton, said in a low, soft voice,—

"Madam, you must try to love me, that you may teach me well, because I wish to return soon to my father."

"I shall be certain to love you," said Miss Elton, irresistibly, as it were.

"I hope you will be certain, madam; how soon do the quickest and cleverest girls leave school?"

"At seventeen, I think," said Miss Elton, who saw at a glance how matter-of-fact her new pupil was.

"I shall try to learn everything you wish me by the time I am sixteen. May I begin now?"

"Yes, dear, but you must change your dress first. Your boxes came yesterday by the wagon, and everything is ready for you.

"When I am dressed, madam, where shall I find you?"

"I will send Millicent Erle for you."

"Is she one of my school-fellows?"

"Yes."

"Will she be kind to me?"

"She is kind to every one."

"Then, madam, I shall be ready to come down with her in half an hour."

"Will you have no one to help you?"

"O, no, madam; papa would be ashamed of his little girl if she could not do everything for herself."

Lotty lifted up her large eyes to Miss Elton's face with a serious, searching look. She seemed satisfied with her scrutiny, and was turning away, when Miss Elton stooped down and kissed her. A smile came over the child's face like a sunbeam.

"Thank you, madam," she said, and retired.

Miss Elton was charmed, and during the half-hour she had to wait for Lotty's reappearance, was solely occupied in thinking of her.

"What intellect in that broad brow and intelligent eyes! What firmness expressed in the mouth and chin! She will be an extraordinary woman."

Millicent went for her at the time appointed; and when she reappeared with the new pupil, about whom something wonderful had been promulgated, all eyes were turned upon her. Lotty's little black frock set off her fair skin to great advantage. Her rebellious curls had been vehemently brushed into some order, but were breaking bounds all over her head, threatening to be in wild confusion shortly. Her figure was round and plump, as a child's should be, without being fat; her features were pretty and piquant, while her eyes were glorious. Altogether, Lotty's appearance created a buzz of satisfaction and admiration. She walked straight up to Miss Elton, and in a confiding, childish way, leaned her head against her, to the manifest astonishment of sundry girls, who had an awe of Miss Elton, profound and deep, according to their various misdemeanors. Miss Elton was surprised by the quickness of her new pupil: Lotty imbibed knowledge like the air she breathed. At five, after working hard, Miss Elton said,—

"Now you must go and play, for it is wrong to work without relaxation."

For a moment Lotty looked troubled; then obeying Miss Elton's look, she took Millicent's arm, and left the room with the other girls.

She stood aloof from them all, watching in silent wonder their games, their bickerings, their altercations.

One girl had fallen and cut herself, the others passed heedlessly on. At that moment a swift foot was heard; a lovely rosy girl sprang forward and raised her with gentle words. "Margaret! Margaret!" was uttered joyfully by every one. "Margaret! dear Margaret!"

"How are you all?" said Margaret; "I am so glad to see you! Look, this is for you, and you," she continued, dispensing packets of sugar-plums. "And who are you?" she added, running up to Lotty with such a sweet glowing face, that she was quite amazed.

"I am Charlotte Beauvilliers."

"And I am Margaret Montagu; and you must take this kiss, because I brought you no packet. I did not know you were here."

"I like the kiss best," said the truthful Lotty; "will you love me?"

"Yes, dearly."

So thus began that famous friendship.

In time, Lotty grew just what her mother meant school should make her — a happy, romping school-girl, full of life, health, and spirits. Her head and heart were not yet fitted for hard trials; she would have done her duty, but probably sunk under the weight of too much responsibility.

CHAPTER X.

But we have forgotten the bride and bridegroom.

They enjoyed their tour very much. Margaret saw more of the world in that fortnight than she had done in her whole life, and Harold (who, to tell the truth, was a little bit *blasé*) derived infinite amusement from her unsophisticated happiness and delight. There was something so new, fresh, and original to him in all she did, that he thought he never should be tired of such a companion. To be sure, she was more girlish and simple than he had imagined, but that was all the more delightful, at least, so it seemed at present.

In the mean time, a very different scene was acting at Montagu House. Millicent and Lotty had accompanied Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu there after the marriage, to assist them in their preparations for receiving their darling Margaret as Lady Leigh.

During the five years that they had ostensibly lived at Bath, they always came during the holidays, accompanied by such school friends as Margaret selected, to Montagu House. Millicent in particular, and Basil, who was asked to meet her, were frequent guests, even during their grandfather's lifetime. For he was a just man, and however faulty his son-in-law might be, and however odious the wife he had taken to replace his daughter, yet he would not suffer the children to be wholly estranged from their father.

Erlscourt was, however, no place for Millicent; but at Montagu House she could now and then see her father, and occasionally spend a day with him.

Not that it could be any satisfaction to a gentle, intelligent mind like hers, to see how misrule reigned there, to say nothing worse. A tribe of rude, unmannerly children, encouraged by Lady Erlscourt, and unrestrained by their father, subjected the half-brother and sister to many slights and indignities, to which less indulgent and kind natures would not have submitted.

Both Basil and Millicent tried in their different ways to be on more affectionate terms with their father's second family, and spared no means to counteract the evil influence of Lady Erlscourt. And amply rewarded did they feel themselves, if in one or two they found symptoms of a better nature, and they willingly put up with their rudeness in the hope of benefiting them.

Age and ill-doings had not improved either Lord or Lady Erlscourt, since the time that Basil had run away, and by this means released himself and his little sister.

He was more morose, irritable, and unsociable than ever.

She had lost the beauty that had raised her to her present position, and was considerably changed for the worse in every respect. In one thing she remained unaltered; her hatred to her step-children only gained strength with time.

Basil stood in the way of her own son becoming Lord Erlscourt, while Millicent's beauty, grace, and dignified manners shone conspicuous to the detriment of her own daughters.

Nevertheless a semblance of interest and affection was carried on, though most warmly kept up on the part of the step-children.

Basil visited his father often, and was at his command on all occasions, for the life Lord Erlscourt led was beginning to tell upon him, and it was often necessary to have such an adviser as Basil at hand. Lady Erlscourt and her numerous low relatives were on the watch to take any advantage they could gain. This her husband knew; and not so much out of love for his son, as to spite her, he did nothing without that son's advice.

The disinterested, highly-principled conduct of Basil ought to have won him their best affections, that is, if they were worth having. But a nature like hers could not understand, and a heart like Lord Erlscourt's could not appreciate, such conduct.

Millicent saw them twice a year, during the holidays, which she was purposely asked to spend at Montagu House. Just before her grandfather's death, she had been engaged to be married to a dear friend of her brother's, Gerald Herbert; but after this death, as was intimated before, their trials began. Millicent's marriage was peremptorily broken off, and she was again sent to school. Not that any objection could be made to the match, or to the object of her affections; but it was simply the old spirit, that had so cruelly crushed her childhood's happiness, again breaking forth, on finding her once more in its power.

Basil, after enduring a series of conduct, disgusting from its mean vulgarity, and irritating from its excessive spite, had left the home he had wished to find with his father, and gone abroad.

But to return to Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu. They have arrived at their destination. Old Sir Thomas finds himself better, warmer, more at home in his old velvet-covered chair, in the ancient library, with its blazing wood fire.

Lady Montagu is busy up stairs. She is not looking to see that their own rooms are neat and well aired, and everything as it ought to be: no, she is in the state bed-chamber, and she is already ordering fires to be lit, and the grand old embroidered satin coverlid to be brought out.

In fact, though she does not expect her for a week, she is preparing for the coming of Lady Leigh.

Lotty is at the window, partly thinking how glorious the trees look in their autumn beauty, and partly, whether her school-wife finds Harold as good a husband as she was.

Lotty has grown a little, not much. The Beauvilliers say to each other, "She is very young, we must not expect to see her very tall as yet."

Lotty has never forgotten her mother's words. Though she is such a wild, mad thing at times, with spirits that nothing seems to tame, she finds out what her duty is and does it.

Millicent is in the conservatory. She hears her name whispered in a broken voice. She looks up. Can this be Basil?

Weary, travel-stained, and pale as he appeared, that was nothing to the haggard wildness in his eyes, his restless, despairing look.

"Dearest brother!" said Millicent, springing to his side.

"Sister, my sister! the only thing I have left to love!" said Basil, in hollow tones.

"Basil, speak not thus, I implore you. What has happened?"

"Ah! Millicent, did you not guess my secret? Could you not have guarded my treasure for me? God help me! for vain is the help of man; or take me to himself, for my burden is too great to bear."

The truth flashed on Millicent's mind.

"Basil, you were wrong not to tell me, to trust me. I conceived nothing of what I too plainly see now — alas! alas! too late!"

"I know it is too late. I hurried home on the receipt of your letter, telling me that the marriage was to take place. I hastened home, not, Milly, to serve myself, but that most lovely, innocent, gentle spirit. I know Sir Harold by report only; but O! Millicent, he is not the husband she should have. Generous and kindhearted I know he is; but she is such a child, she has such a gentle, timid heart; if he does not find the way to it, if he speaks but an unkind word, he will crush it, break it. Ah! Milly, Milly, did you not know that I loved Margaret more than my life? that I only refrained from telling her so, because of her youth and innocence?"

"No, dearest Basil, no, I never guessed it. You have been so much together since she was the little gentle child of seven years old. I traced nothing but the love that had always passed between you. Besides, I was with Isabel at the seaside the last holidays."

"True, most true," murmured Basil. "To the lone forest only did I whisper my hopes and wishes. During the long, silent nights, under the arching boughs, with no spectator but the quiet, gentle moon, did I utter vows to make the happiness of that lovely being my one care and pleasure. O! Margaret, Margaret, lost to me! and still more lost am I; thus dreaming, thus speaking, and thou the wife of another."

Shocked to see that strong, nervous frame shaken like a timid child's, still more shocked at the grief and despair which seemed to have upset that high and noble heart, Millicent could but kiss the fevered brow, and clasp the wringing hands.

"He will not understand her delicate, shrinking nature, apparently timid and weak, but strong in its purposes of love and unselfishness; and she is so young, but a child yet, to be moulded into the intelligent, just-thinking, high-principled woman. I know her, ah! so well. Let a check be given to the efforts her own heart will prompt her to make, and that heart will close, and preying upon itself, will break perhaps, and die, but never open again, to aught save love and confidence."

"Basil, my brother," murmured Millicent, in low, soft tones, "we are not to meet our mother but through much tribulation; I pray God to give you strength to bear this burden. You have much to live for yet. Our house to redeem from perdition, our people and lands to save from destruction. Think, Basil, for one moment, think what we should be without you."

"Give me time, sister, give me time. But you know me well enough to believe that I will not bear this shame upon my heart and live. Give me but time. I will now go to the keeper's house in the forest; I will take possession of my rooms there; I will bury myself and my grief in the heart of the woods. Pray for me, Millicent; pray that I may leave it there, and return to you, blighted, indeed, but with a firm purpose to do my duty, as becomes a man and a Christian. I think, yes, sister, I half think, if I know that she is happy, I may die content."

He buried his face in his hands, and the strong manly frame shook with emotion.

"O, my Basil! may I not come with you? may I not devote myself to you, and you only?"

"No, Milly, no! I must be alone; and I beseech you, sister, tell no one that you have seen me, or that I have returned to England. You shall hear from me constantly; I shall write, yes, perhaps, daily. But give me time, Milly, give me time, and leave me alone to wrestle with my sorrow."

He folded her in his arms with a hasty but fond embrace, and was gone before she could utter one word to detain him.

It was some time before she could calm herself sufficiently to return to the library. [illegible] was still watching the various changes in the lovely landscape, as it lay sloping before the windows, bathed in glowing sunshine; Sir Thomas was dozing, and Lady Montagu reading

"Come," said Lotty, as Millicent entered, "and watch these rooks; they seem bent upon some extraordinary quaint business."

As Millicent joined her, she continued, in a voice hardly to be heard at the other end of the room, "How is Basil?"

"What do you know about him?" said Milly, in amazement, and evasively.

"I mean, how did he bear it?" said Lotty.

"Bear what? Lotty, you are an enigma?"

"No, that I am not; I am straightforward enough. Is poor Basil in great distress?"

"How did you know he was here?"

"I did not know at all, but I had an idea he would come, and I see a man's glove lying on the lawn. Now, it is not Sir Thomas's; gardeners do not generally wear gloves, so I concluded it to be Basil's."

"Lotty, Lotty, you are too quick for me to deceive you. Basil has indeed been here, that is, the ghost of Basil. Ah, my Lotty! never did I see such a change."

"Come, do not take on so; I dare say he wished no one to know he is here, so let us go into the dear old forest, then you shall tell me everything, and cry at your leisure—it will do you good."

Milly looked with surprise at the little school-girl by her side, and when they were fairly out of the house, said, "Little Lotty, tell me how you know all these things that you seem to know?"

"Nobody told me, but I guessed. I am fifteen, and, Miss Elton says, quite learned enough to leave school next year. However, I love Margaret, and I love Basil; I think he is a man, in the true sense of the word, fit to take upon himself the care of such a creature as Margaret. He is loving, yet manly; gentle, yet firm; good, yet forbearing. I like Basil very much, and if he had married Margaret, I would have been bridesmaid; that is, I think I would, for I do not approve of marrying."

"And why, little one, did you deem it necessary to have any ideas on the subject?"

"Why should I not? Did Flory and Carry think of aught else? to say nothing of Augusta. They believed me to be a safe listener, ignorant and innocent, so I heard all, and drew my conclusions. If any man marries you he will do well. If Basil had married Margaret, they would have been happy; now, she will not, without a great deal of sorrow first. If any one marries Flory, he will have a mischief-making, gossiping wife, and that is not good. If any body marries Carry, he might just as well have some old, fat, child-spoiling nurse for a wife, which is also not good. And if any fool marries Augusta,—but is there such a fool in the world? I think not. Lastly, if any one wants to marry me,"—here Lotty drew herself up,—"he will repent it. So you see, out of all of us, I deem only one fit to be married."

Lotty chatted on thus, to divert her companion's mind.

"You are certainly very quick-witted, my Lotty," said Millicent.

"About men, I am," said Lotty; "because I live with them so much. But all my brothers, and uncles, and cousins are true Beauvillians—they all make good husbands; and I wish, Milly, you would think of marrying Norman, instead of Gerald."

"Lotty!"

"Well, do not look so indignant! There now, that has done you good, getting in a rage; no, rage I cannot call it, but getting put out with me. Now, come, pray tell me how is Basil?"

"Heart-broken, Lotty."

"Not quite, I hope. Where has he hid himself?" I suppose at the old keeper's cottage."

"Lotty, you are a little witch."

"No, only sharp. But could you not imagine to yourself that, buried in the heart of the forest, with nothing but the grand old trunks of the trees, and the beautiful, spiritual tracery of the branches all around you, with a pale star gleaming here and there, like the pitying eye of an angel, you could there lay your sorrowful heart before the Almighty, and be sure that the pitying eyes would bear the bruised thing to heaven?"

"My Lotty! how unlike the wild Lotty you talk."

"But why should I not feel, especially for those I love? Basil will talk to his beloved forest, he will pour out his griefs in her lonely, dark bosom, and return to us with the light and the sun; but he will never love any one but Margaret. And now, see the rooks are wheeling about, preparatory to a flight to their dormitories; we must fly home, too, or we shall lose our dinners. You must not fret; you cannot unmarry Margaret. I never approved of the marriage, mind; let Basil surfeit himself with grief, he will then begin to think of the dearest of sisters, and be comforted."

"But, Lotty, you surprise me so; but now you were the little wild school-girl, coming to me for advice on every occasion: our positions seem to me reversed."

"That is because your kind heart is so grieved and disturbed for Basil; your usual judgment and sense are clouded. Now I, caring for nothing and nobody, think calmly and with reason."

"Caring for nothing and nobody, Lotty?"

"Yes, since I have lost Margaret. But, however, do not fear that our reversed positions will be permanent; take your place again, be the loved, honored, adored Millicent, and I will be once more Charlotte Beauvilliers."

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET passed her father's threshold like a sunbeam. Surely they had forgotten, even in that short time, that she was so lovely, fresh, and blooming; or were her natural perfections doubled, as she stood by the side of her handsome, distinguished-looking husband, blushing and smiling under the glance of his beaming eyes? To herself she seemed doubled; another heart was hers, another life and existence bound with her life. Twofold were her sources of pleasure and happiness; she had yet to realize that twofold might be her sorrows.

The partial dotage into which Sir Thomas had fallen, through grief at the loss of his daughter, and fear lest they had not done wisely by their Margaret, gave way before the delight of her presence, the sunny halo she diffused around her. Each night he confided to the equally-pleased mother, "I think we did right to let our Margaret marry;" and each night she answered in return, "God bless her sweet beaming face; may we die ere we see it changed!"

Little Lotty was very unpleasant all this time, and so far from suffering Margaret to hold her former place in her time and affections, was continually to be seen in a biting, sarcastic, acrimonious mood, which had, among her school-fellows, gained her the name of "Bear."

At a certain hour every day she would mount her pony, and, in sulky silence, start off alone for the forest; and though some secret signs might pass between her and Millicent, the Beauvillian blood was not in a mood to submit to any questioning. That she rode some distance and at a good pace, might be judged from the state of her steed when she returned, but nothing more definite could be obtained of her doings.

"Indeed, Lotty," said Margaret, one day, "I think you are very unkind to me; your holidays are nearly over, and perhaps when you are again at liberty I may not be here."

"You will not miss me, I dare say; you have Harold," returned Lotty.

"But I shall miss you, my little school-husband; and do you imagine, because I am married, that every other feeling is absorbed? unkind little bear!"

"When every other word you say is 'Harold,' I do not know how Lotty is to be considered."

"You know my first duty is to him, and all my first wishes should be; nevertheless, there is no reason why we are to love each other less."

"I did not approve of the marriage from the first," retorted Lotty; "it is so absurd of girls to go and marry when they do not quite know their own minds, and, at all events, have not lost all their girlisms, and become reasonable women."

"I do not know that you ever found me unreasonable, Lotty."

"No; I should be very glad for you if I thought you were likely to become unreasonable now and then, for I am sure it would do Harold good."

"How?" said the loyal young wife, her cheek flushing.

"Because he has been accustomed to have everything so much his own way, that he will become a victim to *ennui*, unless you give him a little trouble. If he had been wise enough to marry Augusta, he would have been in hot water all his life, and all the better for it."

Tears filled the soft eyes, so lately Lotty's pride and delight.

"O Margaret! Margaret! don't cry! How can you care for what your wild Lotty says?"

"But I do care; how can I help it? I know you only say what you feel."

"Then, my Queen Margaret, remember what I say: it is not good to let a man see how much you love him, or how great his power is over you. If he has a mean mind, he will take advantage thereof; if he has a generous, kind heart, like Harold's, he will not think the better of you for always deferring to his opinion; he will forget to 'give and take,' 'bear and forbear.' Do not let him think that you are a lovesick school-girl. Husbands nowadays, and all days, I imagine, want some other qualities in their wives beside love, Margaret."

"I doubt I am nothing better, Lotty. I feel great purposes within me, but they are all love, and nothing else."

"Then all I can say is, Harold is very happy to have such love, and I hope it will do you both a great deal of good."

"I must say, I have been highly edified with this lecture on matrimony," said Millicent, coming forward; "and really wonder, do not you, Margaret, where little Lotty picks up her experience?"

Lotty pouted.

"I shall be curious to see how she conducts herself when a wife, shall not you, Margaret?" continued Milly.

"I think she will be the best little wife in the world," said Margaret, her kind heart feeling for Lotty's discomposure.

"Have you the letter ready?" said the little Bear to Millicent, "for it is time I should go."

"Where do you go, Lotty?" said Margaret.

"She is a messenger for me, dear Meg," said Milly; "but I shall not send to-day, Lotty, dear, that you may be as much with Margaret as possible." As she spoke, a carriage, evidently from Erlscourt, drove furiously up to the door. With the certainty that it could only be the bearer of some bad tidings, Millicent and her companions hastily left the room to learn the reason.

Lord Erlscourt had met with some sad accident, such as precluded, so Basil's hasty letter said, any hopes of a favorable recovery. In fact, if she wished to see her father again, she must return to Erlscourt in the carriage sent for her.

It needed no further persuasion to decide Millicent; in a few minutes she was ready. Lotty obtained permission to accompany her; it was well she had that faithful little comforter, for the scene at Erlscourt was much more trying and painful than any imagination of hers could picture. The ungodly, dying father, the selfish, upbraiding wife, the unruly, riotous children, all formed a scene so painful and disgusting, that nothing but the firm determination to do their duty supported the brother and sister.

Basil besought Millicent to make no inquiries concerning the cause of the accident; while she, in tenderness to him, refrained from thinking of aught else than assisting him.

The surgeons had announced their inability to hold out any hopes of life, while the battered, bruised appearance of their patient, his squalid, soiled clothes, and bloated, sullen visage, too plainly showed that a drunken broil with people much beneath him, had given a rascal's death and felon's end to a peer of the realm. And yet this was not so sad to see, as the rude, grasping determination with which his wife and her relatives crowded round the dying bed, with indecorous haste and greediness, to get words, if not deeds, executed in their favor. In vain Millicent, seated by her father's pillow, appalled by the fierce oaths and imprecations that fell from lips that ought to have been praying, besought them to leave him in peace. The words and threats they dare not bestow on him were showered on herself. Basil, seated on the other side bathing his father's hot temples, said nothing; he knew that to speak would be to raise the storm still higher. The dying father looked at his eldest son and daughter; the pitying eyes of each were fixed on him with unmistakable love and devotion; their fair hair, so silky and wavy, so like their mother's, gave them the appearance of angels amid the group of dark, lowering faces. He feebly waved his hand to enforce silence, and in a distinct, clear voice, said,—

"I leave everything of which I die possessed to my son Basil."

The head drooped, the jaw fell—Lord Erlscourt was dead!

CHAPTER XII.

Some months passed away.

Sir Harold and Lady Leigh had departed for Court Leigh, leaving the kind and loving old parents happy in the society of a daughter-in-law and two fine grandchildren, and still more happy in the prospect of seeing their Margaret again at Christmas.

Lotty was once more at school; she had neither eyes nor ears for anything but good hard study. Miss Elton half repented the concession she had made, that she should leave school at sixteen; one more year there, and Lotty would have all the learning Miss Elton was capable of imparting, at her fingers' ends. Already she was much above every girl in the school. No study tired her, no intricacies puzzled her. But Lotty had ceased to be the merry school-girl; Augusta had left school, and it was reported she was going to be married to a rich London banker, an M.P.; but time went on, still neither cake nor wedding favors arrived.

Carry and Flory are both to leave school next half, being two very pretty, ignorant, conceited, happy school-girls. Millicent is with her brother deep in the forest, dwelling together in the old Forest House. But she is happy; sometimes alone with Basil, sometimes accompanied in her walks and rides by a fitting mate for such beauty and gentleness as hers.

She is to be married in the spring; that was Basil's first act and deed, as was fitting it should be. And Basil himself?

In those dark-blue eyes there is a shadow, the beautiful head with its clustering curls of fair hair droops, the fine athletic frame falters, but only when alone.

As his father died with those words upon his lips that left Basil heir to everything, there also fell a conviction upon his mind that he was responsible for everything.

Assuming at once the position he meant to keep, which, spite his youth and inexperience, all could see he would keep, Basil dismissed peremptorily, forever, the rude and riotous companions his father had so unfortunately encouraged; leaving all unnoticed the gibes and sneers that followed all his actions, the taunts that were showered on him, because his father's funeral was performed with the utmost privacy and quietness. It needed but little time to show, that the young Lord Erlscourt knew what he ought to do, and did it. Perhaps the hardest duty he had to perform was with Lady Erlscourt. But she, in her turn, discovered that vituperative threats, beseechings, and entreaties, were alike unavailing with the present head of the house. Besides, her best policy was to be friends, for otherwise she and her children were beggars. The old lord, wicked as he had been, knew the value of a character like Basil's, and felt that he left his wife and second family in the safest hands, when he left them in his son's.

As soon as Basil found that Lady Erlscourt could be reasonable, he, with the delicacy of a good and great mind, opened his plans to her, as if for consultation between them. And she found that although she had only the semblance of a choice, yet she could not but feel that she little deserved the good fortune her step-son was preparing for her.

It was absolutely necessary for the well-being of the estate that Erlscourt should be cleared of its late inhabitants. Basil felt that no efforts of his could remove the base influence of the late reign, so long as one of the old domestics was allowed to remain.

Lady Erlscourt would have remonstrated, had she dared, on Basil's determination to shut the castle up for a term of years; but he allowed her so handsome a sum to hire a house in London, Bath, or any other town, that she could say nothing; further sums were given her, but all at Basil's free command, upon her fulfilling certain conditions regarding her children. The two eldest girls were to be sent to school; he undertook the expense of educating the boys himself; this arrangement would leave her a little girl to be a companion at home.

In every thing to secure the respectability of his half brothers and sisters, Basil acted with the wisdom of an older head, and the generosity of a noble mind.

He fitted up the old Forest House, and having cared for them all, and established them all as he wished, he waited but the end of their mourning to make the patient Millicent happy, happy in the love and confidence of a heart most worthy of her: to give her such happiness as was never to be his.

True, he had many duties before him, and he would taste the rare happiness of doing good, and reaping the fruits thereof. He had the hard, and yet most pleasing, duty of improving his estates, reforming his tenantry, repairing the rack and ruin of the last reign, and was young enough to feel assured that, in all probability, he would see the benefits of his labors. Was there no pleasure in these prospects, in these hopes? There was.

Basil again said to himself, —

"If I only know that the gentle angel who so early crossed my path of life is happy, I shall live content."

CHAPTER XIII.

Court Leigh was a very fine old place: quaint and curious were its angles, courts, and turrets, with casement windows of all sizes and shapes, scarcely two alike. Myrtle trees crept up to the higher windows, cut and trimmed with such old-fashioned precision, that the eyes lingered lovingly on a wild creeping rose, which sent its thousand clusters of scented blossoms in every direction. Down by the lower windows it grew with the grave decorum that seemed to pervade the place; but up out of reach, it threw its graceful branches in wild confusion over the staid myrtles, peeping out here and there, when least expected, every bright blossom laughing, as in sport, that no pruning knife could reach them.

The stately pleasaunce of olden time was not wanting, leading to an avenue of walnut trees; this was again crossed by one of elms, and further in the distance was a double avenue of gnarled old oaks; magnificent trees, many centuries old, leading the imagination to wonder if they ever could have been young, tender saplings, so old, so gray, so venerable did they appear.

Near the house was a stately parterre of flowers, with clipped yew trees at regular distances, and little summer-houses at each corner.

Not a dead leaf to be seen, not a twig displaced, not a branch out of order. Lovely as the old house looked in the evening sunset, yet said Margaret to herself, "What a formal old garden!"

Lady Katherine Leigh, with the gentle and quiet Pru. and Pro., were there to greet the newly-married pair, and while the bride felt that nothing could be meant more kindly, the formality of her reception matched the garden.

Between a small lane of servants, Lady Katherine advanced, and restraining, by her solemn manner, Margaret's gentle impulse of affection, made a sort of oration over her, which visibly affected Pru. and Pro. and some of the stately maidens, while Harold inwardly chafed, and suppressed tittering might have been heard from among the younger servants. She was about to perform the same ceremony over her son; but taking his mother's arm in his, he led her into the drawing-room before she had time to say a word.

"My son, my dear son! on such an occasion it was proper I should say a few words."

"Dearest mother, I am so fatigued," said Harold, throwing himself listlessly on the sofa.

"A few words, my dear son, were expected of me; I had prepared them."

"I kiss your hands, dear mother, and ask for permission to have some soda water."

Lady Katherine was not to be put down in this way; Harold had his soda water, shared half with his dear Meg, drew her on to the sofa by his side, and then felt he might listen patiently.

So he had it all two or three times over, with the action intended for each point; and while he might weary at his mother's prolixity, he felt thankful this scene, copied from some act of the blessed Queen Charlotte's, was enacted before so small an audience. Three out of the four certainly listening with devout and reverent attention, not to say admiration.

Lady Katherine was a very kind-hearted, good woman, but not by any means a sensible one.

Let an idea once gain entrance into her brain, it remained there stereotyped; no accidental circumstance, no change of events altered that idea; it became fixed in her mind in the original state in which it entered. She had married late in life herself, indeed she was nearly forty before that event took place, consequently she had not undergone the ordeal of a new life, or a new change of ideas, when the mind was young and plastic; she had therefore no idea of change — variety was inconceivable. Whether her opinions and habits agreed with old Sir Harold Leigh's, might have been questioned had they lived long together; but having ample reason to be satisfied with the discretion and care with which she ruled his house, the stateliness with which she presided at the head of his table, and the excellence of her *cuisine*, he managed to live very happily for eight years with a woman who was certainly intended by education, if not by nature, for an old maid, rather than a wife and mother.

On becoming a widow, Lady Katherine assumed an extra portion of reserve and state. Everything was conducted after the manner of a small court; whereof Lady Katherine was Queen, the pretty little erect ladies, Georgina and Charlotte, were princesses, and a rosy, curly-pated, baby boy, the heir-apparent.

Under this stiff but kind rule, formal but gentle sway, no wonder Georgina and Charlotte changed into Prudence and Propriety.

Harold of course went to school, from school to college, from college into the army, ever bearing a deferential and dutiful feeling towards his mother, while each change of scene and place the more unfitted him for the sombre pleasures of his home.

It never entered Lady Katherine's head that a young man ought to have something to do; she could not expect the fine, handsome, lively boy to sit down, knit or knot, play quadrille or cribbage, evening after evening, from week to week, year to year, as the dutiful and patient Georgina and Charlotte did. But still she could not suffer such an act as that he should go shooting with keepers, hunting with farmers, fishing with strangers. She suffered prodigious anxieties, trying to think of some employment for him, having some faint remembrances of idle hands and Satan's mischief, which tormented her, without her being able to discover why it did so. She ransacked the old library for proper, and at the same time reasonably entertaining books for him; she even learned backgammon to please him; though Pru. and Pro. were sent to the other end of the room when they played, that their innocent minds might not even know the look of dice. Nevertheless Harold's holidays always cost her a fit of illness, and the termination of them was generally highly agreeable to all parties, though they loved each other warmly.

As Harold grew older, he would have liked to employ the many hours he spent over idle stories, novels, or travels, or that he lounged away with his dogs, or slept, or ate away, in riding over his estates, and becoming acquainted with his tenantry.

But that was quite forbidden, was considered about the last thing he ought to do; in fact, everything regarding business, all the duties and obligations of landlord and tenant, were carefully kept from him, not from any other feeling than that Lady Katherine had been taught to consider there was an insuperable bar between the rich and the poor.

They had an agent or steward — he was the proper person to manage such things; but for Sir Harold to know that he had tenants who had wants, or for them to know that they had a landlord who would himself attend to such wants, was deemed by Lady Katherine a thing unknown, unheard of.

So from his childhood Harold had many idle, weary, listless days, wherein he had nothing to do, nothing in which to be interested.

This had imparted to his character a sort of indolent independence of anything not peculiarly interesting; torpor of mind would accompany torpor of body; and though on occasion he could readily throw off both, and appear the frank, generous, intelligent fellow he really was, yet he as readily gave way to the *dolce far niente*, and was at the time of his marriage as useless and uninteresting a member of society as a rich young baronet could be allowed to be.

Nevertheless he was the cynosure of the loveliest, softest eyes, the loadstone of the warmest, gentlest heart this erring world can give.

Though no one was present save themselves, Lady Katherine had deemed it proper to have a grand banquet prepared; all the rich old family plate, all the rare old china, and drapery marvellous for age, beauty, and fineness of texture, were displayed.

But Margaret was thinking so much of Harold, so far from her at the bottom of the great table, yawning and looking vexed, that she noticed but little of all this grandeur. They went through the long, stately dinner in a dignified manner certainly; Lady Katherine prosed to her heart's content; Pru. and Pro. feebly chirped, now and then, little staid sentences; Harold was almost silent, and Margaret was fast catching the chirping tone, in her efforts to comport herself to Lady Katherine's satisfaction.

When at last the weary dinner was over, and the servants were withdrawn, Harold jumped up with some degree of energy.

and protesting he would be banished no longer, seated himself in the old-fashioned window, where Margaret, with joyful alacrity, joined him. She looked very much inclined to seat herself upon a loved knee that looked an invitation most indisputably; but awe of Lady Katherine prevented that indecorum; still one little white hand did nestle coaxingly in the luxuriant hair, so dark, so rich.

"My dear," said Lady Katherine, "pray do not; remember there are young people in the room; I cannot permit Georgina and Charlotte to witness such —— "

"Dear mother, may not my wife pull about my locks?" said Harold.

"Certainly not, I never heard of such a thing; should any servant have occasion to enter, pray, my dear son, what would they think?"

"Servants have no business to think, mother," said Harold, yawning.

"Shall we go out, Harold?" whispered Margaret.

"Yes, by Jove we will! any place is better than this banquet-scented room."

"Pray, my dear son and daughter, be seated. I have much to say to you, Harold; as a mother, it is my duty to give you some advice on your conduct as a married man, and the head of your family."

Harold sat down without a word certainly, but with an expression in his face Margaret had never seen before.

Lady Katherine recapitulated her speech before dinner, with sundry other remarks, which altogether drew the discourse into such a length that Harold was convicted of a snore in one of the most interesting parts. Apologizing in sincerity for his rudeness, Harold declared he must go out, for the journey, and the length of the dinner, had fatigued him in a great degree. He disappeared in such a hurry that Margaret had not even time to obtain a glance. She was too timid to dare to think of accompanying him, so she followed the stately and rather offended old lady into the great drawing-room, with an air as meek and obedient as her two daughters.

There they sat for two long hours, doing nothing but listen to the old lady's numerous and rather confused stories of her court life; — while Margaret heard the step she loved best in the world, pacing up and down before the windows, smelt the faintest scent of a cigar, and heard the low humming of a voice that was music to her.

Yet she felt it very wrong and treacherous of her to feel tired, weary, and forlorn, and not even the admiring glances and timid whispers of affection from her new sisters could make up for the hearing that measured tread. With tea came the truant, much refreshed, and very eloquent in his praise of the beauty of the night.

Then remarking the pale looks of his wife, he recommended her to go to bed, whither the kind Pru. conducted her, and the more active Pro. ran on before, to see all was as it should be.

In the warm, simple affection they gave her, Margaret did not take further notice of their childish pleasure and girlish questions, than to imagine that they were adapting their manners to her school-girl habits; and she loved them all the more for their goodness to her.

Lady Katherine had sense enough to know, and good-nature enough to declare, that she and the young Lady Leigh must not reign together. She only intended to remain with them a short time, to give them the advantage of her wisdom and counsels, to start on their matrimonial career with dignity and propriety.

A house within the park had been prepared for her and her daughters, so near, that at any time her valuable advice could be had for the asking: so Margaret, with the sweet earnestness natural to her, and the modest appreciation of her own merits, set herself seriously to work, to imbibe as much courtly wisdom as she could; thinking, in the innocence of her girlish heart, that she was making herself more fit to be the wife of Harold. He was not at first aware that a curb was placed upon the happy flow of spirits, so delightful in his eyes, but rather imputed the change from her girlish gayety to embarrassment and fatigue consequent on her new position. So no wonder Court Leigh seemed to him still the dullest, most weary place in the world.

"I should like," said Margaret, one day, as they paced slowly among the formal old flower-beds, "to make a really pretty garden here. These beds look very stiff from the windows, and there are no flowers, either sweet or new, in them."

"I think, little wife, that is a very good notion; the country is such a bore, and this is such a dull old hole, I shall be glad of something to do."

"O! Harold, do not call our home dull!"

"But it is, Margaret; I have nothing to do here."

Margaret was too young and ignorant to know why or wherefore this was the fact, but said,—

"You shall make the plan of a garden, and so will I, and our sisters shall judge between us."

"Make a garden, dear Margaret," said Pru.

"You and Harold make a garden!" echoed Pro.

"No, not ourselves, but draw the plan of one," said Margaret.

"O! draw a plan," said Pru.

"Of a garden?" said Pro.

"Yes, quite right, and you shall judge which is best, my plan or Harold's."

"But we do not understand plans, dear Margaret," said Pru.

"No, we never studied plans, dear Margaret," said Pro.

They had peculiar drawling, but still sweet voices; and as they echoed each other, Margaret could hardly resist laughing, while Harold said in mimic tones, "I hope you will teach them plans, dear Margaret."

The two gentle sisters blushed at their brother's mockery, but a horseman appeared on the lawn, which prevented further converse on their part; for, like well-bred, obedient girls, they fluttered away through the open window, to place themselves under the care and surveillance of their mother, although Harold exclaimed, "It is Philip!"

Philip was a man, though a cousin, and a young man too, that is about their own age, very handsome also: so, though a near relative, they did not appear again but in the company of their stately mother.

Margaret had time to notice the new arrival, and to learn his relationship to her ere he dismounted. Save her own Harold, and perhaps Basil Erle, he was the handsomest man she had ever seen.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHILIP LEIGH was Harold's first cousin; he had a small estate and a beautiful house, called High Leigh, in the very centre of Harold's property. He was some years older than Harold, and as his uncle, the last baronet, had married very late in life, for some time Philip had been considered heir-presumptive. Even after his uncle's marriage with Lady Katherine, two little girls were born succeeding each other quickly, but for five years no other children followed. It was therefore most natural that Philip's father and mother should look upon their son as the future baronet, and bring him up accordingly.

Philip was beginning fully to appreciate the idea of being Sir Philip, and to speculate upon Court Leigh being so much more desirable to live in than High Leigh, when Harold unexpectedly made his appearance nearly six years after his youngest sister, and not above four months before his father's death.

Philip never forgave Harold this disappointment.

Though handsome, clever, witty, sensible, and moderately rich, Philip lived in the world honored and esteemed, yet nourishing in his heart a foolish, mean feeling of envy, which only wanted a little encouragement to break out into malice.

Sufficiently talented to succeed in whatsoever he undertook; handsome enough to gain admiration wherever he went; moderate in regard to luxury and wealth, so as to feel perfectly satisfied with the fortune he possessed, yet Philip counted none of these things of any value or pleasure to him, simply because he was not Sir Philip.

It was strange that so childish and foolish a notion should have taken such deep root in a naturally strong and vigorous intellect. But so it was: every one is supposed to be weak on one subject, and that was his, little as any of his intimate friends or admirers thought so. He was unmarried, not through want of any opportunities of being so; for his handsome mouth would curl with rather supercilious pride when questioned on the subject, and he was wont to turn such conversation from the point with a half laugh of scorn, that his hearers granted Philip Leigh might use with impunity.

There was not a young lady in his county who would not have been proud to call Philip Leigh husband, and he knew it, from poor little Pru. and Pro., upwards and downwards. No, he dwelt alone; there he could brood over his one disappointment, and rate and rail away in solitude at a freak of fortune, neither he nor any other man living could remedy. It may be imagined, therefore, he came with no very friendly feelings to greet Harold's wife; that Harold, who became Sir Harold at four months old, and who grew and throve in a manner surpassing most babies, and was therefore the more to be disliked and envied.

Who caught measles, hooping cough, and scarlet fever with wonderful celerity, and threw them all off as quickly as he caught them.

Who never got a bad fall, though riding by stealth, for fear of his stately mother, all the most vicious and unbroken horses in the neighborhood.

Who never was shot, or shot any one, or accidentally blew out his own brains, though, for the above-mentioned reason, he took every available opportunity, whether safe or unsafe, of acquiring knowledge in the art of gunnery.

He grew up unscathed, unharmed, as fine, strong, and healthy a specimen of her Majesty's subjects as might be seen in her dominions; and here he was with a wife, who would most likely put an effectual stop to Philip's secret ambition.

His quick, handsome eyes, looked thoughtfully on Lady Leigh, as she blushingly welcomed her Harold's kinsman. "Very pretty, but young and foolish," he mentally said to himself.

As he rode home after half an hour's visit, he mused within himself, and thought thus, —

"Lady Leigh is very lovely, but she has married by six years too soon; she is nothing but a school-girl still: if I mistake not, Harold will want something more than a merely pretty wife, to bind him to a home he has never loved. If in her present pliable girlhood she takes pattern by Lady Katherine they will not be happy long. Harold must have excitement of some sort, or he will be annoyed to an intolerable degree. Humph! I think Lady Leigh has not wit to see that she should strike out a line of her own, and not copy Lady Katherine. I think she already begins to speak like Pru. and Pro., and Harold will never stand such peaking and puling. However, far be it from me to interfere: if he would marry a school-girl who ought still to be in her pinafore instead of wedding gear, it is no business of mine. Yet there is a look in her eyes, a wonderful look, — I suppose it is love, — pure, deep, earnest love, such a love as lives but once in the human heart, and leaves it but with death. Will such a love conquer the monotony and every-day trials of married life? Will it prove of sufficient depth, fervor, and strength to bind Harold to an existence, place, and people he has hitherto always disliked and fled from? In an older heart it might perhaps; but I do not think under that simple girlish manner such devotion will be deemed to dwell. I wonder how I should feel with a wife's eyes looking at me as hers did at Harold? I fancy I should like it; I have now nothing left me but to marry. But whom? Not a single woman that I know could I tolerate for a month, not even Harold's pretty bride, with her fathomless love eyes.

"I have lost the excitement of wondering if Harold would marry; now my fate is decided; I feel that unless I get up some irritation, some object about which to interest myself, I shall sink into the hereditary malady of the Leighs, and become a hypochondriac. Marriage is hateful to me — every woman to be had for the asking; so that unless I may act Bluebeard, and marry a new wife when I am tired of the old one, — 'I'll none on't.' I think I will amuse myself by making mischief between Harold and his wife. I'll not go too far, but just see if my judgment is at fault concerning their future career. If he would marry a raw, innocent school-girl, it is surely no fault of mine."

CHAPTER XV.

So Philip became a constant visitor at Court Leigh, and was quite aware that he was a most welcome guest. His easy, quiet flow of amusing conversation, his pertinent and sensible remarks, were each in their turn admired by the whole household.

"Philip puts me much in mind of his gracious Majesty," said Lady Katherine, who meant George the Third, and had not been able to realize the existence of any other sovereign; "his remarks are so sensible, without being verbose."

"My cousin Philip is very sensible," chirped Pru.

"I think our cousin Philip is sensible," echoed Pro.

"Philip is a good-hearted, downright amusing fellow," said Harold.

"I am always so glad to see Philip," said the softest, sweetest voice possible, "he amuses Harold so much."

Philip knew as well as Harold that great discontent and much distress reigned throughout the whole estate of Court Leigh.

The old Sir Harold had never interested himself about it; and more from ignorance than unkindness, Lady Katherine had declined interfering between the tenantry and the steward; and, as we have seen, brought up Harold in the same ignorance.

The little that he did know only made him take refuge in the old proverb, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." With his natural predisposition to indolence, fostered by education, he had imbibed a sort of horror of every sort of business; therefore everything was left in the hands of his steward, who, while doing the best he could, was obliged to sacrifice some person at times to meet exigencies; as that never could be the heir, of course all grievances fell on the tenants. Dilapidated buildings, tumble-down cottages, gateless fields, broken-down hedges, marked the property of Court Leigh in every direction. But Harold was not induced by the sight to put them to rights, for he did not even know they were his; also he might, had he not been too indolent to notice it, have been struck with the difference between his cousin's small estate and his own. Philip had not a bad heart, but he had suffered the little speck of envy to spread and corrode it; also, he was not religious; like many men of vigorous intellect and strong mental powers, he was apt to make those powers his God. Save that he was not Sir Philip, the head of the family, what was there that he was not? In his own eyes none were equal to Philip Leigh, with none could he compare himself. Yet this one black spot of envy was making him a mean man, and leading him on to do things for which he would be condemned and despised by every right-minded, honorable man.

A little encouragement about this time, from one esteemed as he was, would have made Harold exert himself; and, once he began to interest himself in his affairs, it was not difficult to imagine he might become an efficient country gentleman.

But Philip took a contrary course.

For want of some better amusement Harold, with no love for it, was apt to linger over the wine, more to escape his mother's prosy court stories and lectures than anything else: Philip encouraged him in this. In their many conversations and mutual confidences, the warm-hearted, frank Harold would dilate upon the simple beauty of his wife's character. Philip chimed in with a sort of compassionate, supercilious air, that gave one the notion they were talking of some young and timid pet, and left on Harold's mind the impression that his wife was a mere child. And although Philip hated himself for this meanness, he was yet so led away by his master-passion, that he kept on in the same course.

"O Lady Leigh!" said he, one day, "I am delighted to find you alone. In general you are so surrounded with delighted admirers, that I am unable to get in a word."

"Yes," said Margaret, simply, "my sisters are very kind to be so fond of me; we get on so happily together."

"Then you must not be surprised if I envy them," said Philip; "I, who delight so much in the society of superior female minds, and have so seldom enjoyed it."

"Did you not, then, know Lady Katherine before?" said Margaret.

"Is she laughing at me, or a fool?" thought Philip. Then aloud, "O, yes! But do you compare yourself to Lady Katherine?"

"No, not at all," said Margaret, laughing. "I, a simple school-girl, O, no!"

"But the loveliest of her sex," said Philip, with hypocritical fervor; saying to himself, "She is so simple, she will swallow anything."

"So Harold says," said Margaret, quite composedly, but with such *naïveté*, Philip could see she cared not one straw for her beauty save as Harold prized it.

"Would that I had been so fortunate as to see you before Harold did," he continued, in a low voice.

"Ah, yes!" said Margaret; "for then you would have told me of him, and I should have learned to love him ere I saw him."

Philip bit his lip, the corners of his haughty mouth curled with disdain, as Margaret continued, —

"For I was very much afraid of him at first, and would neither speak to him or look at him, which was very foolish, was it not, Philip?"

"Yes; but, pray tell me, do you love no one but Harold?"

"O, yes! What is this world to me but love! I have experienced no other feeling! I know not unkindness, or ever heard a harsh word; love surrounds me, and I can but give love in return."

"Will you give it me?"

"O, yes, dear Philip!" said Margaret, holding out both her hands and taking his, her lovely face beaming with affection and brightness. "How can I help loving you, Harold's own cousin?"

Foiled again, Philip Leigh! What sort of character is she — can she be? for such a one had never crossed his path before. Was she really so very innocent, so simple, so guileless? Did she really love Harold with such strange earnestness and devotion, that she could see nothing but through him?

She was a woman after all — nothing but a tender, loving woman. There must be some soft spot in that gentle heart to which he, in his world-wise wisdom and pride of intellect, could surely find his way. He had never been foiled by woman yet; and that a school-girl should puzzle him was not to be endured. The Leigh lethargy disappeared under this new excitement; we will leave him to pursue his way.

CHAPTER XVI.

BASIL and Millicent were quietly living in their forest home; he, schooling his heart to perform its allotted duties, through the long life that seemed his probable fate. The gayer, fairer, more delectable path being closed before him, he turned into the rugged, rough road of duty, and already, in the distance, discerned gems of beauty and brilliance opening their rays towards him, as if from heaven.

Millicent was preparing for her marriage, and studying, among the wild forest children, to learn the duties of a clergyman's wife.

Gerald Herbert had been for some years in holy orders, but as yet having no living, he acted as curate in large, densely-populated, neglected towns.

Conscientious, zealous, and indefatigable, he was one of the most promising specimens of the young clergymen who now, in these happy days, begin to abound in this still more happy land.

His beaming eyes, his energetic countenance, and firm, strong character, would have marked him in earlier ages as a willing and enthusiastic martyr. But, in these times, they give birth to the surmise, that, in the flush and excitement of youthful energy, he might perhaps be led into extremes, which his matured judgment would deprecate.

The marriage was to be very private, because the year of mourning for her father had not yet expired; still Basil intended the ceremony to take place at Erlscourt: wishing to prove if his earnest endeavors, his high principles, had conquered in the task he had given them to do.

Sir Harold and Lady Leigh were among the first guests invited; and while Margaret was glowing with delight at seeing them all again, Basil was nerving himself to receive in pure and noble courtesy in heart as in conduct, that woman as a guest whom he had hoped to welcome as his wife.

But Margaret had two other reasons, besides her dear Milly's promised happiness, for looking forward to this meeting with feelings only to be described as ecstatic.

Her Harold, so like her Harold, had desired her to present, as a wedding-gift to the bridegroom elect, the living of Holmleigh. It was worth five hundred pounds a-year, with a very pretty rectory-house, and above all, was only a mile from Court Leigh. Thus Margaret and Millicent might look forward to spending their closing years together, as they had done their opening ones.

The other news could only be whispered; and it was whispered in the sweet twilight, as they sat together the first evening that they met. Had there been light enough, Milly would have wondered at Margaret's beauty, with the rosy bloom blushing bright, and the dark, soft eyes glancing with a pure radiance as she uttered her secret.

"I am to have a little Harold in the summer; you will be near me, Milly, and will see that he is his father's image." Milly showed by her delight the due importance she attached to this secret.

It may be deemed strange that Millicent did not urge Basil to seek any other guests save his present ones: but she judged of his heart by her own, and knew that he would not be calm and free from vain and foolish regrets, until he had thoroughly rooted from his heart any love for the wife of another, than what ought to find place there.

The wound might smart under this mode of treatment, but its cure would be all the more effectual the more it was cauterized; and to see her, be with her, her husband by her side, her love for another before him, would, she thought, be the last thing necessary.

She appeared before him more lovely than ever, more gentle and engaging than his former fondest expectations had deemed possible; but the pure halo of a wife's love surrounded her. He enshrined her in his heart as an angel, and vowing her a brother's love, with warm courtesy and generous hospitality, he set himself the task of welcoming Sir Harold and Lady Leigh to Erlscourt, as honored and beloved guests.

"How came it, Queen Margaret," said Sir Harold, "that you never told me of Erlscourt and Erlscourt lord?" Harold had adopted Lotty's term of endearment and devotion for Margaret, and she well became the title; there was something so stately in her sweet simplicity, so queenlike in her modest air. This Harold said one night in conjugal conference.

"This is my first visit to Erlscourt," said Margaret, nestling in her accustomed place.

"But Erlscourt is nothing without Basil, as you call him. How came you to be so intimate, sweet Meg?"

His "sweet Meg" told him the whole story from beginning to end, winding up by saying,—

"You know, Harold, there is no one like Basil in the world, and we all know it so well, that I thought you did also."

"A pretty confession from a wife to her husband, Queen Margaret."

"In what way, Harold?" she answered.

"Did you not say, there was no one in the world like Basil? and am not I, your husband, deemed worthy a comparison?"

"O, no! Harold, I compare you with another? You knew that could not be; a wife does not compare her husband around, about, near her; he is her husband, what more? the rest of the world are nothing."

Harold kissed the earnest, beseeching eyes, half pleased with the devoted love she thus betrayed, and half amused at the seriousness with which she answered his bantering, though none knew better than he did what that answer would be.

"I am so sorry Harold, my little Lotty will not be at the wedding."

"I am sorry too, for your sake, dear wife; but I care not much for your little friend; she does not seem to affect me, Margaret."

"O, yes! Harold, she does; she is the dearest, truest-hearted little thing in the world."

"She may be, for aught I know."

"I want to ask her to come and see me at Court Leigh; may I, Harold?"

"Ask the whole school if you like, my Meg, governess and all."

Margaret laughed in girlish glee at this notion, and then said, "So kind you are, my Harold."

"But do not forget my mother's lecture upon young ladies, with which she favored us three nights running; if I mistake not, she passed some rather severe censures on your Lotty, and designated her an unmannerly hoiden, while Miss Clare was her beau ideal of high breeding and gentlewomanliness. That's a long word, but it is my mother's favorite one, and which she uses as a text when she sermonizes Pru. and Pro.

"How funny you are to-night, Harold; but though I cannot explain why, everybody at school loved Lotty, and very few cared for Augusta."

"O! that is easily accounted for — Augusta is very handsome."

"Dear Harold, how naughty of you, so unlike you, to say such a thing."

"It is rather sharp of me, I own, but I always feel very lively and chatty when away from Court Leigh; my spirits get the better of my discretion. But ask all your school-fellows that you wish, sweet wife, for it will enliven that dull old place, and Pru. and Pro. want a little school-girl nonsense knocked into them."

"I will ask my bridesmaids and Lotty, Harold; thank you much, and you must ask Basil."

"Very well, we will employ our time in getting up a love-match between him and one of the school-girls; I shall like that, it will be something to do."

"I hope Lotty will be his choice," laughed Margaret, entering into her husband's mirth.

"No, no, none of them will have a chance with Augusta; besides, being much the prettiest, she is much the best hand at flirting: your Lotty is a little bear."

"Ah! that is what we called her at school; she is sometimes cross, but so true and warm-hearted, and she might be so conceited and spoiled, for she is so idolized among her own people."

"However, I think none of them quite good enough for that glorious fellow, Basil, none but you, Margaret: now, how came you, Queen Meg, to miss falling in love with him? Confess now, and perhaps I will give you absolution if you tell the whole truth."

"Indeed," said Margaret, laughing and blushing, "I have nothing to confess; Basil and I were just like brother and sister."

"To tell you the truth, my little wife, I think I just secured you in time; when you left school and had nothing to think about, and were in the habit of seeing that fine fellow constantly, I doubt not you would have tumbled 'full fathom five' in love with him."

"No, no," said Margaret; "only you, Harold."

"I promise you I am pleased to think so, my Queen. I have taken a great fancy to our host; I never saw a more 'proper man:' with his coat thrown back from that broad, powerful chest, his black silk handkerchief knotted with such careless grace around his throat, his locks, bestowing themselves so picturesquely round his head, I was greatly struck with his appearance at first sight; then, Meg, when he spoke, when his countenance lighted up, and he looked at me, with his wonderful deep blue eyes, and such a smile passed from the eyes down to the mouth, like the sun breaking through a cloud, why then, Margaret, I wondered you never fell in love with him."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE wedding day arrived.

Unlike Margaret's wedding, there was no crying, no dressing, no hurry, no train of bridesmaids, no glitter, no pomp. Her two half sisters, Sir Thomas and Lady Montagu, with some of Gerald's relatives, formed the party. Caroline, Florence, Lotty, and Augusta had all been asked, but Caroline was going to be married herself to a bluff young country squire, and wanted Florence's able assistance; Lotty was at school, and Augusta wrote to say, "That though her heart would be with them, and she should regret to the end of her life, however long she might live, that she could not come; yet the fact was, she begged it might be kept secret, she could not obtain leave of absence from a certain person, who must be nameless, but who ere long would have the fiat of her fate in his hands, &c., &c. The sentence was very long, and ran on from one thing into another, until it became a matter of difficulty to discover its real meaning.

But it was a very happy wedding.

The affectionate love of Basil proved itself in the joy with which he gave his sister to the husband who had waited so patiently for her; and the gentle Millicent herself, having no home to regret, no parents to leave, had only one alloy on this her wedding day — she had to part from Basil.

After the ceremony was over, they left for their new home, Holmleigh, where Gerald was to enter at once upon his duties. Margaret and her husband intended paying a visit to her good old parents, and from thence return to Court Leigh.

"Dear Meg," said Harold, as they left Erlscourt, "I am sorry to leave this place, and though I mean while we are at Montagu House to trouble Basil pretty often with my company, I somehow feel as if we were leaving a good atmosphere when leaving him."

Margaret had been content to know that everything went well when Basil was at hand, without finding out the cause; so she merely answered, —

"I am so glad, Harold, you like him."

"I do more than like him, I respect him. I begin to think I was not rightly brought up. Surely if Lord Erlscourt thinks it necessary to look after his own affairs, to be up early and late, not suffer even the meanest of his people to be denied an audience — it would not be unbecoming a baronet to do the same."

"O Harold! but you would not like it, you would be so troubled and teased; Basil has been accustomed to trouble all his life, his father was not good."

"I feel quite certain I should be horribly bored; but I much question if it is not the proper thing for a landed proprietor to do, Queen Meg."

"It may be, Harold; but perhaps your people are different from Basil's, and I should think your mother would certainly know what was best."

(Ah! sweet Margaret, in your jealous love for your husband's honor, are you not pandering to his besetting sin, indolence?)

"Well, I shall think it over while I stop here, and at all events I will watch Basil, and see if I can adopt a hint or two. I believe our people are a horrid set; but from all I can hear, none are more lawless than those about here. And yet what order he has them in; young as he is, those wild forest-men respect and love him as if he were their king. He is never idle one moment; that, I agree, would be too much for me."

"O, yes! dear Harold, you would be away from me so much."

"What! you always want me by your apron-strings, do you, little wife? I think it would be as well to absent myself now and then, just to see how you would welcome me back again."

"No, no, Harold, I could not bear it."

"Well, well, child, do not turn pale; I dare say I shall never be anything better than idle Harold Leigh all my life, with no other hard work than to wait on your ladyship's wishes. But, Meg, I cannot be in Lord Erlscourt's company without thinking; I cannot see his energy, activity. and judgment, without asking myself, Where are mine? what am I doing? and I, really, I have no answer to give."

"You would not be other than you are, my Harold?" said Margaret, half mournfully.

"Humph! I am not so sure of that. little wife. I think I could not have been formed only to hunt, shoot, fish, and yawn through life."

Basil was studying Harold's character, and while he did full justice to his frank-hearted, generous disposition, and perceived that the image he had inherited from God was noble and good, he also saw the mischief that had been done to that character by education. His education had been based on a false foundation. His duties had consisted of outward forms and courtesies: these tend to gild a fine character, and are properly the result of Christian principles, the polish of a self-denying, holy life.

Harold had the gilding, but it had been placed on metal unrefined, untried in the fire. Beneath the gloss, who could tell what dwelt?

Basil also saw that in the warmth and fervor of a love like Margaret's, the sense that would have budded forth with blossom, had nothing eclipsed it, was fast becoming obscured by a feeling that amounted to idolatry.

It became a character like his to try and make the man who had married the woman he adored, fit to be her husband; while, in his gentle, brotherly way, he endeavored to open Margaret's eyes to something besides her Harold.

It was all done so unostentatiously, every right and proper duty was placed before Harold in a manner so pleasing and just, that he returned to Court Leigh with the determination to try and be the worthy, active proprietor of a landed estate.

Had Margaret encouraged him, the trial might have succeeded. But who know better than those who have tried, the difficulties that seem to arise, like mountains in a night, when you begin what may be considered an act of duty?

Harold soon got disgusted with meddling, as his mother called it, in his own affairs. His steward gave him no encouragement, of course; rather perplexed than helped him out of his sea of worries. His mother was scandalized at such unheard-of conduct. Margaret was vexed to see him worried and wearied, while Philip Leigh laughed at him.

No wonder then that Harold relapsed into his old habits, and passed his days in listless idleness, his ideas becoming as torpid as his body. The measure of his disgust at trying to follow Basil's example was completed by Gerald Herbert.

The active rector of a long-neglected parish, justified by his holy profession to call alike on rich and poor to amend their lives, Gerald Herbert was deterred by no feeling of self-interest in declaring unwelcome truths; still, with all his high-souled zeal, his pure and ardent labors, Gerald lacked the gift of persuasion.

What was your duty, ought to be done; no compromise, no weak excuses, no allowance for extra feebleness of will and purpose. "*You ought*" and you "*ought not*" formed the basis of his creed.

Unflinching, just, and exact, he gave no heed to weaknesses he knew not; he made no allowance for failings he could not understand.

"One sin makes you guilty of all," thus he argued; and his parishioners, long neglected, and only now hearing what was their duty, grew faint-hearted and wavering under the stern and uncompromising line of conduct he imposed.

And none more so than his patron and their landlord.

Harold, whose heart opened and whose bosom expanded at a line of conduct that charmed his sense, had he not been peremptorily commanded to adopt it, grew stubborn and irritable under his rector's lash. And Margaret and Millicent sadly learned that unmitigated, happy intercourse was not to be their lot. The two gentlemen only met to quarrel; that is, Gerald never quarrelled, but he so managed to irritate Harold, that he had but to prefer a request to have it refused.

Thus the good that Gerald would and could have done, was negatived: Harold grew even more irreligious than he had been; he required to be beguiled into such feelings, never having been taught to consider it aught but a duty. And thus matters went on, each week adding to the ill effects of the last; Philip Leigh seeing it all, and assisting the evil for purposes of his own.

In due course of time, as Margaret predicted, she had a little Harold; it was the image of its father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Margaret had recovered, she fulfilled a once-formed intention, and invited her schoolmates to pay her a visit. Augusta accepted with much and unfeigned pleasure. "Her heart and mind had been sadly torn by the necessity she had felt to break through the strongest ties of love, and separate herself from one who possessed her sole affections, but of whose principles and religious character she could not be satisfied. Though life was henceforward but a vale of darkness for her, she deemed it her duty to bear up with fortitude and resignation, and she felt that the society of her loved Margaret, and daily communion with the dear Saint Millicent, would prove the only balm that could soothe her. Lotty accepted, on condition that her father was included in the invitation, and that a flight of affectionate Beauvillians might now and then be tolerated, in case they felt it impossible to exist without looking after their chief and "the girl." Flory and Carry were abroad, the one on a wedding tour, and the other accompanying her as the happy bridesmaid.

Lady Katherine much approved of a little company at the great house: it was time Margaret should accustom herself to act the great lady; though the sight of her school-fellows would not probably impress Margaret with the necessity of much assumption of matronly dignity.

"I am pleased, my dear," said the old lady, "that Miss Clare is coming; you will do well, Georgina and Charlotte, to take copy by Miss Clare. Her carriage is beautiful, her courtesy quite perfection, her manners blend the dignified with the graceful. I do not quite admire your other friend, my dear Margaret."

"My little Lotty! she is so good, Lady Katherine."

"So very obliging," chirped Pro.

"So very kind," said Pru.

"Charlotte and Georgina, you are led away by appearances; I, your mother, have said it. Surely the honored Lady-in-waiting of our good queen must know who is most worthy of your notice."

An idea crossed Margaret's mind that Lady Katherine was the victim to appearances: but she had too great an opinion of her mother-in-law to permit such a fancy to remain there. Harold's mother too! To the honor of the much-subdued Pru. and Pro., they could not subscribe in their hearts to their mother's judgment in this instance; this they showed by being silent when Augusta was the subject of conversation. For during the brief period of their intercourse at Margaret's wedding, Augusta had made no secret of her amusement at their expense, and indulged in various unpalatable remarks about old maids, and other matters equally foolish and absurd; while the little Lotty had proved their friend on all occasions. And a friend in need she was, for their meek, secluded, quiet ways, were ill fitted to cope with rosy, healthy, happy, intelligent school-life.

Besides, she was so amusing, and opened to the view of the two quiet women quite a new species of being in the world. Certainly there were few like that same little Lotty. Wild, capricious, wilful, and passionate, who performed each duty as she did? who thought with such judgment? who mastered the most abstruse lessons with ease, who saw what no one else ever thought of, who was here, there, and everywhere. A midge, a myth, a fairy, yet a Solon, a Norma, a prophetess, — wonderful Lotty! Well might her mother die with the thought in her heart, "What will be my little Lotty's fate?"

Augusta arrived first of the expected guests, and seemed to find immediate consolation for the sorrows of her wounded heart, by discovering so distinguished and desirable a gentleman as Philip Leigh domesticated in the house. She at once took possession of his present unoccupied time, declaring that his soul was kindred with hers.

Philip was not disinclined to the flirtation; for besides thinking Augusta the handsomest woman he had seen for some time, he had a mind to find out if Margaret would feel the loss of those devoted attentions he had become accustomed to pay her. Augusta's beauty was her only merit; his clear head and strong sense saw through her weak and vain character before the first evening was over. So, though he continued to amuse himself at her expense, it was merely to see the effect of his experiment. This reason for flirting with Augusta soon vanished, for ere the end of the week Margaret, to his great disgust, said to him, —

"I am so glad to see, Philip, that you like Augusta; it would be very nice if you married her; I should like her to settle near us."

Philip rode off in dudgeon, and shut himself up at home in a sad, sulky humor. Meantime Lotty and her fine old father arrived, attended by a brother, an uncle, and a kinsman. These latter meant to depart immediately, but Harold's hospitality would not permit of that. It was hard to say which felt the most emotion, as Margaret laid her little child in her school-husband's arms.

"I know nothing about babies," said Lotty, trying to smother her feelings.

"Is he not like Harold?" whispered Margaret, as she gazed lovingly on her little child.

"I would rather he was like you," was the answer. "However, I suppose I shall not hurt him if I kiss him. There, sir, go away; in a year or two we may be playfellows."

Really Court Leigh was not like the same place with these happy, jovial, good-hearted Beauvillians in it. Lotty's father was an invalid, and generally remained in his own room until the evening. Not that he was ever alone; sometimes the brother, then the son, and anon the kinsman would be flying up stairs, with eager faces and evident delight, to say that the weather was most beautiful, the wind in the right quarter. This would be discussed with great spirit and interest. Then another would appear to say, that at two o'clock Mr. Beauvilliers was to be ready for his drive; charioteer, Lotty. This always caused a long discussion, how well she drove, who taught her, and other little anecdotes truly Beauvillian. Perhaps the news would be, that so many more flowers had blown, that all the ladies were singing, playing, or working; but no matter what the news or how trivial, from the hearty jovial way in which it was told, it became interesting enough to form matter of history.

In default of Philip, who seemed to have deserted her, Augusta took forcible possession of the kinsman Beauvilliers. The son she heard was married, the uncle too old; but this cousin seemed a most suitable stop-gap, Philip being truant; and he in the most innocent manner fell, as Augusta thought, open-hearted into the trap. He was rather more innocent than Augusta calculated on; for she found that unless she entered with warm interest into all that concerned Lotty and her father, his attentions soon flagged. However, as he was a fine, handsome specimen of the Beauvillians, she put up with a great deal of stupidity from him, and contented herself with snubbing Lotty on all private occasions, and hating her cordially in her secret heart. But she was not prepared for the following stroke of ill fortune.

She had beguiled Frank Beauvilliers (such was his name) into a charming stroll under the old oak avenue; then and there she determined to open upon him the full battery of her charms and amiability. The engaging, pretty way in which she took his arm, the innocent, kind look that she bestowed on him from those beautiful orbs, might well deceive a stronger mind than that belonging to an open-hearted Beauvillian. Accordingly he became more communicative and cordial than was usual even with his race; and said, in answer to a very kind look, —

"I am very much obliged to you, indeed, for bringing me here; I have something on my mind, and you have been so kind and friendly to me, I think I cannot do better than ask your advice."

"I will give the best I can with the greatest pleasure," said Augusta, not without some wonder: for though she thought her present lover an innocent, in the fullest sense of the word, she did not think he was so very young as to be about to propose, after a week's acquaintance.

"What kind people these are here," said the good Frank, "they are so thoughtful about Mr. Beauvilliers; Lady Leigh treats him like a father, and he is as well taken care of here as at home. And then so fond of Lotty: even the old grandlady seems inclined to be kind to her; and as for the two Miss Leighs, I really think they look upon Lotty as a sister."

"Very true," said Augusta, in a greater state of amazement than ever.

"Do you know, Miss Clare, I think I never met with kinder people."

"They are very kind, certainly, Mr. Frank; but what has that to do with what you have to confide to me?"

"Why, Miss Clare, it has a great deal to do with it: I can assure you, yesterday, when Miss Georgina Leigh was talking to me of Lotty, and describing all her goodness, her attentions to her father, her love for her relations, and then her sense, her wit, her cleverness —— Really, Miss Clare, our girl is a perfect wonder; where she gets all her qualities from I cannot think, unless it was from her mother, who was such a woman! my dear Miss Clare."

"But what has all this to do with what you have to say to me, Mr. Frank?" put in Augusta, impatiently.

"Truly I beg your pardon, Miss Clare, I have wandered from the subject certainly; I always do when I talk of Lotty. However, where was I? O! to be sure, just where Miss Georgina was talking to me. Really when she said this, all in that low, quiet voice of hers, I could have taken her hand and kissed it; I could, indeed, Miss Clare!"

"But is that all, Mr. Frank, you had to communicate?"

"No, not quite, Miss Clare. I wished just to ask your advice; as a friend of the family, you will perhaps be able to tell me if they would be affronted, if they would take it amiss, my just telling them my opinion."

"Of whom, and what, sir?" said Augusta, getting heartily sick of her companion.

"Of Miss Georgina, Miss Clare. I should like to propose for her, she is so fond of our Lotty; really I should like to do something to show my sincere gratitude; and if Miss Georgina would but consent to be my wife, I would make her happiness ——"

But Augusta had fled, from what cause the innocent Beauvillian could not surmise. Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps a bee had stung her, and she did not like to inform him; perhaps she had seen some one she knew in the distance. At any rate, the worthy Frank only wondered at her flight, so long as he was dubious whom he should select as her successor in his confidence.

At first he thought it should be the next person he met. Then it occurred to him, it would be but right towards his chieftain to consult him; for he felt sure Mr. Beauvilliers would be as anxious as he was himself, that none of them should entertain ideas or wishes that could not instantly be made known to the family. In fact, as a point of honor, Mr. Frank felt that he must dismiss the amiable Georgina from his thoughts, until he had fully and thoroughly informed her family of his feelings towards her.

Mr. Beauvilliers proved a much more efficient confidant than Augusta. He not only listened all through with great attention, but joined heartily and cordially in all the digressions on the virtues and extraordinary sense of "the girl;" and when the communication was supposed to be fully detailed, he was quite ready to listen to it all over again.

He duly appreciated Mr. Frank's first motive for bestowing his affections on the amiable and Lotty-loving Georgina: and nothing now remained but to call in the Beauvillians, uncle and son, to participate in the confidence.

They both fully entered into the matter; applauded Mr. Frank, and were quite jovial over the expedition with which he had fallen into love, but suggested no great improvements in the manner of proceeding in this delicate matter.

So Lotty was sent for; and as they all had anticipated, and told each other it would be, she hit upon the right plan in a moment; moreover she was highly pleased, and so praised Mr. Frank for his judgment and discernment, that he quite blushed.

Acting under Lotty's advice, the party proceeded to Lady Katherine's, and having told what appeared to be the united wishes of the party, asked leave for Mr. Frank to endeavor to make himself agreeable to Miss Georgina.

Now many mothers, with two daughters verging on thirty years of age, who had never had an offer in their lives, and only that little episode of the curate, nipped peremptorily in the bud, as the nearest approach to a love affair, would have accepted at once, and in haste, this unexpected, most sudden sort of love-at-first-sight offer.

Not so Lady Katherine; she took it as a matter of course; she was thirty herself before she thought of such things, and never dreamed that her daughters would be so unmannerly as not to follow her example. But she was very gracious, and treated them to a series of court anecdotes, which might have begun in matrimony, but certainly did not end in it; they seemed also likely, by their length and repetition, to extend the interview to midnight.

Luckily the dressing-bell reminded her that other matters might demand their attention besides listening to her. All Mr. Frank's private affairs were laid before her, and as they proved very satisfactory, he had permission given him to try and win Miss Georgina's affections. "But on no account," said Lady Katherine, "be precipitate — the dear young creature must not be prematurely alarmed; he had known her but a week, so she should wish that a more lengthened period might elapse before he made his proposals in due form; etiquette demanded it." Mr. Frank scrupulously obeyed Lady Katherine's command, and said nothing of love to the amiable Pro.; but his Beauvillian descent made it impossible for him not to betray his wishes to every person in and around the place, save the gentle object of his affections; everybody knew it, everybody was consulted, and everybody helped him in his courtship, until he, in the gratitude of his heart, wished he could have married them all.

Pro. wondered at his attentions, but said nothing, only to the mischievous Lotty she might say, "Your cousin, Mr. Frank, is a most agreeable man, he has very fine eyes, something like yours, dear Lotty."

CHAPTER XIX.

Philip Leigh had now been shut up for about a fortnight, that is, he had shut himself up. The dark spirit was upon him. He was disgusted with himself, and everything around him. He could not understand Lady Leigh's character, it was an enigma to him; he was acting like a person in the dark; he, whose intellect commanded anything, was he to be foiled by such simplicity as hers?

And yet what was the use of his wearing himself to death for nothing? two healthy lives, each likely to be longer than his, stood between him and his long-wished-for title. Why need he tease and worry himself about a thing he could not prevent? Why! indeed: but it had grown into a habit; it had become second nature, amounting almost to monomania.

He was growing tired of himself and his thoughts, they were so mean and contemptible; but where was he to go? what was he to do? There was no amusement in flirting with Miss Clare. Like a moth hurrying around a candle, she would only flutter about him to her own detriment; for as to marrying a woman of that stamp, why, he would sooner quit the world at once, no matter how. As he meditated in this desultory way, Philip heard shrieks, prolonged and shrill.

A few bounds brought him to his own entrance gate, where was chained a large bloodhound. Supported by a young girl, was the lady of his late thoughts, Miss Clare, and from her ruby lips came the fearful shrieks.

"Miss Clare, my dear Miss Clare! what is the matter?" he cried.

"The dog, O! that fearful dog!" screamed Augusta.

"Hush?" said her companion, "do you not see the hound is chained up?"

The speaker was shaded from Philip's sight by a large hat; she was also half smothered by Augusta's larger, fuller figure.

"Come, Miss Clare, be pacified; as your little friend says, the hound is chained up," said Philip.

"Will you protect me?" gasped Augusta.

"Certainly! take my arm."

"But I am so faint and ill."

"Can you walk as far as my house?"

"What! and pass that savage beast! O! never."

"Come, Augusta, don't be foolish," said her companion, pettishly; "as if a dog like that would harm you."

"I beg your pardon," said Philip, "Miss Clare is so far right, the dog is a very savage one; but he cannot harm her now, being securely chained."

"A hound like that is only dangerous when chained up," said the straw hat; "if suffered to be at large, he would be more gentle than a lap-dog."

"You are mad! child," said Augusta, "talking in that foolish way; such a beast would tear you limb from limb."

"It is not safe, I believe, to go near him," said Philip.

As he spoke the little girlish figure walked straight up to the hound, and patting him on the head, stood leaning against him. Then, taking off her hat, she put it playfully on the dog's head, while she ran her little white fingers through her dark curls; and as they divided with the touch, Philip saw for the first time Charlotte Beauvilliers.

He deemed her some rare, old picture, descended from its frame, walking about the world to show what unstudied beauty was.

Lotty certainly was very *petite;* though the Beauvillians had assured each other she would grow, yet she only did a very little.

But it was such a pretty, little, light, elastic figure, so rounded and well-proportioned, so supple and graceful; the little, lovely throat so stately and erect, and shown to such advantage by the small, well-folded down white collar.

Lotty had the Beauvillian mouth and nose, the latter bending down with a slight approach to a Roman nose, meeting the short upper lip with a curve to match; both seemed to be in perfect keeping with the full rosy lip below — putting the gazer in mind of the pictures of Sir Joshua Reynolds's children, but without their archness; for while in his pictures the pointed chin seemed but the continuation of the curved mouth and nose, Lotty's was full and round, giving a decision and firmness to her countenance, that the upper part of her face fully bore out.

Clear, brilliant eyes, without a shadow in them, looked full at Philip. No triumph, no exultation in them, merely the calm, searching gaze of an intelligent mind.

He stood transfixed, at a loss what to say; but his whole heart occupied in looking at the picture before him. The beautiful, dark bloodhound, and the white robed, childish figure, how lovely they looked, thus grouped together.

"Now, Augusta, you can pass; I will keep the dog quiet as you go by," said Lotty at last.

"You will be killed, you foolish child! and you will be rightly served," was Augusta's answer.

Lotty put her hand under the hound's mouth, and lifting it up, looked steadily into the deep-set eyes; then putting her lips to his shaggy forehead, she laughed, and said, —

"He is as quiet as an old sheep."

"It is wonderful," said Philip, at last, "the power you seem to have over him; he is generally a most savage animal."

"That is because you chain him up; if he was my dog he should be as free as air, poor fellow!"

"Will you accept him? you will oblige me much if you will allow me the pleasure of presenting him to you."

"I should like to have him very much," said Lotty, frankly; "he is the most splendid fellow I ever saw; he seems quite young too, and has not lost his puppy coat."

"I shall be delighted to give so fine an animal to one so worthy to possess him," was the courteous reply.

"Then I may loose him?"

"O! don't; don't for mercy's sake!" said Augusta; "I shall die if you do!"

"Pray, Miss Clare, come up to my small abode, and have some restoratives after your long walk and alarm. Then, while you are resting, the hound can be loosed, and get over his first transports before you return."

"But what is his name?" asked the new possessor.

"Bear," said Philip.

"Bear!" repeated Lotty, rather confusedly.

"Ah! what a good name," said Augusta; "it is her own, Mr Leigh, great Bear and little Bear."

"I cannot conceive how your young friend can deserve such a name as Bear."

"O! but she does, and I will prove it to you as we walk to your house. Come, little Bear."

"No, I thank you, I am not fatigued, and want no refreshment; I shall stay here and make acquaintance with my new friend;" and turning to Philip, "I thank you, sir, very much for such a gift; I shall value it highly, and you may rest assured I will be a kind mistress to him, though at present I must ask you for a small switch, as he might prove too rough in his first use of liberty."

"I do not like to leave you quite alone with him," said Philip. "I will return shortly, when I have placed Miss Clare in the hands of my housekeeper."

When Philip returned, the great Bear was loose, indulging in the wildest gambols, and the little Bear was standing on a great stone, watching him with delight. Philip stood and looked at her, without her being conscious of his return.

"Bear! Bear!" she cried. The hound bounded towards her. "Down, Bear, down! no rudeness, you beautiful fellow! kiss me, Bear! now be good and be off again."

"Bear! Bear!" again she cried. This time he was disobedient, and she stamped her little foot and shook her little switch, calling "Bear," in a peremptory manner, until he came slowly and deprecatingly, his loving eyes glancing furtively at the little switch, the little hand, the little childish figure. "Naughty Bear! disobedient! go, Lotty does not love you."

Philip could have watched her for hours; the quick grace of her movements, the sweet thrilling voice, the beautiful healthful face, glowing and happy, and her dress so picturesque and quaint. The large hat with its long drooping white feather, the cool dress with its little tight fitting jacket, showing the white plaited chemisette and round collar, the dainty little boots; she was a perfect picture.

"Well, have you made Bear pretty obedient?"

"Yes, I think so. Do you know, I am very much obliged to you, for I have long wanted a dog like this; are you quite certain you can part with him willingly?"

"Quite certain to you; but pray may I ask the name of the fortunate Bear's mistress?"

"You heard Miss Clare call me Bear too."

"But I presume I may not call you Miss Bear?"

"You are welcome to do so if you wish it: but now we must return home, having a long way to walk."

"Miss Clare says she is too much fatigued to walk back. I have therefore offered to drive her to Court Leigh. Will you also favor me with your company, Miss Bear?"

"Ah, I knew very well when she asked me this morning to take a long walk, she would never be able to accomplish it; however, come she would: I suppose she had a purpose. Perhaps it was to see you, as you seem old friends."

"I do not presume to think so, Miss Bear, I assure you; but will you not return with me to the house?"

"No, I thank you, I walked here and can walk back. Good morning, and thank you. Come, Bear."

And before Philip could say another word, the great Bear and the little Bear were careering along the meadows, utterly regardless that they were leaving the company of the handsome, witty, talented, courted Philip Leigh; for aught they seemed to care, he might have been ugly, stupid, and a grandfather.

CHAPTER XX.

Philip endeavored to elicit something from Miss Clare, on their drive home, regarding her little companion. "Who is the child that was with you?" said he. He saw into the depths of Augusta's heart as well as though he were there, and knew that he should gain no information if he showed any great interest in the matter.

"O! little Bear; she is a sort of school-fellow of mine."

"And what is her name, and how came such a little uncongenial companion with you, Miss Clare?"

"Yes, is she not a little absurdity? Poor child! I believe she has been badly brought up, or, at all events, has no mother, only tribes of male relations, and they have made a little groom of her."

"I dare say she will be passable-looking when she grows up." Philip privately thought her the prettiest body he had ever seen.

"I believe she is grown up; at all events she has left school."

"Where is she abiding now, that you happened to be in her company?"

"O, she is a wonderful friend of Margaret's. How it happened I don't know, but they have sworn a never-to-die friendship, and they are as unlike each other as I am perhaps."

Here Augusta looked bewitchingly at Philip, who answered as was expected, — "Like you, Miss Clare! pray what possible thing on earth can be likened to you?"

Then followed sundry little interesting passages in the true art of flirting, which cannot be described, as the initiated know that words are not so expressive as looks on such occasions.

However, Philip having done what he considered his duty, continued, — "What is the name of your little friend?"

"Dear me!" said Augusta, pettishly, "how much you seem interested about that girl: her name is Lotty, and she is staying at Court Leigh with her father, and some rough uncouth sorts of men relations. If you stay to dinner — and you are sure to be asked — you will learn all about this pet of yours. But I know you won't stay to dinner, just to provoke me. I declare, if I am to be moped to death, as I have been for the last fortnight, I shall go home."

"Ah! Miss Clare, pray don't darken our hemisphere by such a thought. Now that we have seen the sun, can we exist should it leave us?"

Philip continued in this strain until the drive came to an end, mentally resolving to indemnify himself by staying to dinner if he were asked. Though he did not suppose the little school-girl "Bear" would appear in full company, he thought he might chance to get a glimpse of her in the evening.

The quiet coolness with which she had walked up to the hound in spite of his warning, the unsophisticated delight with which she had taken possession of Bear, without fear, without nonsense of any kind, just suited his taste. "I wish the child was a little older," thought he. There would be some pleasure in bending that little indomitable spirit to one's will; making such a little wilful thing in love with one. Unlike some one who shall be nameless, but who is unfortunately close by at present, unlike the lovely, lovesick Margaret, unlike the gentle, quiet Millicent. The first, did I marry her, I should beat in a week; the second would pall me with sweetness; the third, I should respect and admire, but wicked human nature like mine is not given to love such saintlike goodness."

Philip Leigh was warmly welcomed back again, and would have been forcibly detained to dinner, had he not already consented to remain.

As all were assembled for dinner, Philip stood, his fine figure erect, his handsome face, calm and proud, with the quiet disdain in his dark eyes that was usual there. He had been introduced to three Mr. Beauvilliers, all bearing their honest, kind natures in their countenances and appearance.

He was watching the amiable goodness with which one of them was devoting himself to the amusement of Pro., when the door opened, and unmistakably a fourth Mr. Beauvilliers appeared. The likeness to the others was palpable; though an aged and white-haired man, they seemed but as shadows in his presence; for a more magnificent specimen of a fine old English gentleman Philip had never seen. And leaning his large, powerful hand on the dimpled shoulder of a little figure by his side, Philip could scarcely believe, at first, that he saw before him the little Bear, and the occupier of his thoughts.

"Miss Beauvilliers and Mr. Beauvilliers," said Harold, introducing them; "my cousin, Philip Leigh."

It was a habit of the Beauvillians always to shake hands on an introduction, a good hearty shake; and Philip's hand was in that powerful grasp, without his having withdrawn his eyes from the little fairy figure.

"You are the gentleman who has been so kind as to give my Lotty a very valuable present. Thank ye, sir, thank ye; shake hands, Lotty, and let me hear you say thank ye, too," said her father.

Lotty laid her little tiny hand for a moment in Philip's, who could hardly believe he held anything, after her father's gigantic grasp. Then saying, in a soft, but clear voice, "Thank you, Mr. Leigh," she put the great hand on her shoulder again, and guided her father's feeble feet to a large chair in the window. There was no look of the child about her now.

"Do you know," said Philip, after dinner, when he had contrived to get a seat near her, "I took you for a little girl."

"I suppose no one would consider me a big one," answered Lotty.

"I mean," said Philip, rather put out by her answer, "that I really thought you were a child. If I had known that you were Miss Beauvilliers, I should have treated you with greater respect."

"And ought not children to have polite treatment as well as ladies?"

"I beg your pardon, certainly they ought; but Miss Clare so puzzled me about you, I fear I ran into great mistakes, and must beg you will grant me forgiveness."

"If I find no fault, I do not see why you need be penitent."

"I will forgive myself, then, for having fallen into such an error. But permit me to ask, did you reach home in safety? did Bear behave as so noble a dog should, transferred to such lovely hands?"

"We arrived in safety, and I make no doubt Bear will be much happier with me than you, for he will have his liberty."

"You have been here a fortnight, have you not? and I never knew it; what a dolt I have been," said Philip.

"Perhaps so. But I do not know you sufficiently well to assent to your judgment as yet," replied Lotty.

"Surely you can see that I consider myself a dolt, for having deprived myself, for one whole fortnight, of an introduction to you," continued Philip, trying his usual style of conversation with Augusta.

"I think it was unlucky for Bear; but as for you and I, I do not suppose we shall care for each other at the end of a fortnight, more than we do now."

"Nay, Miss Beauvilliers, you are unkind to me. May I not look forward to being favored with your esteem, and then perhaps regard, if I prove worthy of such friendship?"

Those large, clear, brilliant eyes looked full into his. The scrutiny seemed satisfactory.

"I am not likely to think with indifference of the person who has given me so great a pleasure as the possession of Bear. But here is my father coming, and Miss Clare has been looking at you for the last hour, wondering how you can prefer such childish company to hers."

She was at the door ere he could stop her. It opened, Mr. Beauvilliers was there as she said. "Ah, my darling!" the fond father cried, "as usual, always ready. I came so quietly; but no, I cannot move, but my Lotty hears." The massive hand leaned on the little, slight girl, and when placed in his chair, with Lotty on the arm of it, Philip saw he could hope for no further word from the little Bear; so he talked to Augusta, and looked at Lotty, and was not unhappy.

It was a sight to see the father and daughter together. Lotty seemed to feel intuitively when her father wanted his cushions changed, which foot he would like placed on the footstool, what subject he most affected to converse upon; while at no time did the fine, massive old frame move, but the large hand rested on the slight figure, sometimes on the round little ivory shoulder, sometimes on the rich waving curls, but at all times it felt its treasure within its grasp.

There sat Lotty like a little queen, her radiant eyes speaking straight into the heart — "I know my duty, and I love it, and fulfil it;" and the loving Beauvillians would sit round, and pay her the homage she deserved.

And they seemed to have brought the blessing of their fine frank natures on the dull old house of Court Leigh. Harold was no longer morose or unhappy, or inclined to quarrel with Gerald; Margaret was as beaming and smiling as the happiest wife and mother could be. Lady Katherine stepped forth from out of her courtly state manners, in a way quite astonishing to those who knew her. The ice of reserve and etiquette was thawing under the genial glow of the Beauvilliers.

As for Pru. and Pro., for the first time in their lives they felt young; and when Pru. (having had that little curate experience, several times mentioned before) suggested to Pro., that Mr. Frank really seemed very particular in his attentions; the gentle Pro. blushed, and the blush remained on her somewhat faded cheek, giving her so pretty a bloom, that Mr. Frank grew quite rampant for the days of his probation to be over.

Gerald's uncompromising sternness gave way before the hearty good will of the Beauvilliers.

"My dear sir," said the fine old squire, when Gerald, in the flush of his anxious heart, to do good to all who came in his way, offered to read and talk daily with him — (for the days of this aged pilgrim were numbered, as he himself knew full well) — "My dear sir, God be merciful to me a sinner. At my age, with the seeds of a mortal disease within me, it does not become me to inquire into any new creed, or way of worshipping God. I ask myself, Have I done my duty well? and I can only answer, To the best of my ability, I have tried."

"But, my dear sir, you must confess before God that you are a miserable, blind, poor, lost sinner. Do you feel the need of a Saviour?"

"I do not feel the need. I feel I have him; God be thanked for the peace and calm of my closing years."

"That, I am afraid, is not sufficient. We must purge out the old man with fasting, prayer, and penitence; we must not leave a single sin unexposed, unconfessed. Ah! my dear sir, think of the beatitude of such a state of sinless repose."

"Every man, my dear Mr. Herbert, must not expect such a lot, or where would be the need of the Saviour? I am apt to think now, at the end of the days of my pilgrimage, that this, our state, is not so much to attain perfection, as to work the daily task of human life, by which we may be rewarded with perfection."

"I see what you mean, Mr. Beauvilliers; but such an error is dangerous, most dangerous."

"It will be dangerous for my father to sit here any longer in this draught, Gerald," would Lotty say; "so while I take him into the house, go and preach to Augusta, or some other great sinner."

Then would Gerald look grave, and perhaps rebuke Lotty for being flippant, who would answer gravely back again, —

"I am ready to confess, and be sorry."

CHAPTER XXI.

Mr. Frank's days of probation were over, Lady Katherine having graciously condescended to say that the time deemed fit by propriety, decorum, and courtly example, being fulfilled, he was at liberty to make his proposals to Miss Georgina herself. And in furtherance of such object, she said to the astonished Pro., —

"Get your parasol, and take a turn with Mr. Frank under the walnut trees."

Certainly this was rather a public place for such a circumstance, inasmuch as the avenue was commanded from every window in her house, as well as those of Court Leigh.

Pro. never dreamt of disobeying, and Mr. Frank, fortified with various powerful shakes of the hand from his kinsmen, and many good wishes for his success, departed with the amiable object of his affections at a decorous distance from his side.

Most men would have been nervous had they supposed themselves to be under the surveillance of many curious eyes (though no words could be heard), in such delicate circumstances; but it was a peculiarity of the Beauvillians that they could do nothing in secret or alone. Therefore, Mr. Frank thought with pleasure and satisfaction of the eager and anxious Beauvillian eyes that would be scanning his every action, as he took this eventful walk.

Lady Katherine also took her station at her window, that she might be able to judge with her own eyes that the proposal was made and accepted according to the strictest rules of etiquette. Pro. herself was the only unconscious person in all these base plots, and went, perhaps a little fluttered, but quite an innocent victim to her destiny.

They walk about a yard apart.

Mr. Frank bows.

"He is beginning," say the eager Beauvillians, from their windows.

"Very respectful," thinks Lady Katherine, from her window.

Pro. starts, and Mr. Frank bows lower.

"He is in full cry," exclaim his sympathetic kinsmen.

"Poor child! how fluttered she will be," murmurs Lady Katherine.

Pro. stops short, then starts again, as if about to run away. Mr. Frank places himself before her, and bows lower than ever.

"He is well on the scent," cry the Beauvillian windows.

"I almost think he is at this moment proposing," says the other window.

Pro. drops her parasol, and attempts to grasp at it. Mr. Frank takes the extended hand in his.

"Bravo, Frank! that's the way; you have her now!" cry the Beauvillians.

"O!" gasps Lady Katherine; she half thought she must shut her eyes, but her anxiety to see that all was conducted with the strictest propriety, made her look more vigilantly than ever.

Pro. puts her handkerchief to her eyes; Mr. Frank bows lower than ever, so low, indeed, that surely he is kissing her hands.

"'Tis done! she's won!" shouted the Beauvillians.

"O! O! O dear!" cries Lady Katherine, and vanishes from the window, for fear he should do it again, or something worse.

Mr. Frank was seen to draw the lady's arm within his, in a very tender and gallant manner, then picking up the parasol, he bore off his prize to a more shady and secluded walk. Not, however, without giving his hat a sort of flourish in the air, which was the sign agreed upon to denote his complete success, ere they disappeared.

Though all the Beauvillians were impatient to the last degree to shake Mr. Frank's hand off in hearty congratulations, and to bestow kinsmanly salutes upon the bride-elect's cheek, it was deemed only right and kind to send Lotty first, for fear she should be overcome; the loving little Lotty, who, by winning the gentle Pro.'s heart, had inspired Mr. Frank with such a prodigious idea of her sense and discernment.

Lotty met them after an hour's absence. Mr. Frank was like a sunflower; so broad and expansive was his triumphant delight. Pro. had shrunk between bashfulness and bewilderment into such a shred, that she was quite hidden behind the glowing Mr. Frank.

"How do you do, dear Cousin Georgina?" said Lotty, smiling.

"O! dear," cried Pro., getting quite limp and damp, with a sudden gush of tears; "how very nice! and you, darling Lotty, is it true that we shall be cousins? Dear! dear! how am I ever to believe this wonderful thing!"

"I knew you would be pleased, dearest Georgina," said the gallant Mr. Frank, "at being Lotty's cousin. I felt more certain that you would accept me on that account than any other."

"Yes, indeed," answered Pro., innocently; "you are very kind to say so, Mr. Frank, that is just it. But, indeed, I ought to say, that you — that is all — in fact, my sister and I think there never was any family like yours, dear Lotty, for goodness and kindness."

"May you ever think so, dear, sweet Georgina," exclaimed Mr. Frank, pressing her hand so tenderly, that Pro. grew quite nervous, and looked helplessly at Lotty to relieve her.

"I thank you also, cousin Georgina," said Lotty, "and I am sure you will find out shortly, of all the Beauvillians, there is no one so good as cousin Frank."

"Shall I, indeed?" said the innocent Pro.

"Yes, that you will. See how Margaret loves Harold; that's just the way you will love Frank, and be running after him all day in the same silly manner."

"No affection that my Georgina deigns to bestow on me, dear Lotty, will be thrown away, as you know," replied Mr. Frank.

"Well, that being clearly arranged, I think you two ought to go to Lady Katherine, to get kissed and blessed. After that, you know, cousin Georgina, you must take to loving Frank instead of me, and I shall expect in a few days to hear you calling out at the top of your voice, 'My darling Frank.'"

"I shall ever love you, dear Lotty, in my heart of hearts," whispered the half-smiling, half-crying Pro.

The whole of that evening was spent quite as an April day. When the Beauvillians took the lead, the sun seemed to shine out in the most refulgent manner; when Lady Katherine spoke, little gentle drippings of rain poured down, in the shape of tears, from herself, Pru. and Pro.

On the whole it was a most exciting evening; but Lotty was not prepared when she went to their room to wish her new cousin good night, to find the two sisters in convulsions of grief.

"Heyday!" said Lotty, "what is the matter, that you are howling like two naughty children?"

"We have never been separated," sobbed Pru.

"I only wish Charlotte could marry too," sighed Pro.

"I see not the slightest objection to that," said Lotty; "I will send for another of my cousins, or one of my brothers."

"O, no, no! that won't do," cried Pru.

"I don't know, Charlotte, but I think it might," said Pro.

'O, no, no!" again cried Pru.

With a great deal of trouble and difficulty, Lotty was at last made aware that there was once a curate.

"Well! so there are now," said Lotty, "numbers, if Charlotte wants to marry a clergyman. I don't think any of our people are in that line, Pro."

"But it was not any curate; it was one, one in particular."

And the elderly but most simple-hearted Pru. poured forth the long-cherished secret of her heart into the unsympathizing bosom of the little girlish mischief, Lotty.

"Well, don't cry so. If he is half worthy of you, he is still unmarried."

"Yes, I know he is," sobbed Pru., that makes me so — so — so ——" the rest of the sentence was lost in a burst of grief.

"Now do cheer up, Pru., and listen to reason. When Pro. is married and settled, she could have you to visit her; then she could ask the curate, and then you would meet. Now, what could be nicer than that?"

"And I *will* ask him, dear Charlotte; and Mr. Frank, I know, will help me, and ask him too, and then, perhaps, as darling Lotty says, it will all turn out so nicely."

But Pru. still wept sorely.

"Now, Pru., you are naughty," said Lotty, with great ferocity, knitting her brows, and looking as bearish as she could. "Here is your sister so happy, going to marry a Beauvilliers, and he my cousin, and you are weeping like Niobe."

"We have never been separated before, dear Lotty," sobbed Pru., jerking out her words between each sob.

"I am sure if the law would allow it, Frank would marry you both if he could. But as it won't, you must make up your mind to Pro.'s loss."

"I — I — ca'-a'-an't, dea-e-ar Lo-otty!"

"I will not marry then, dearest Charlotte," said Pro.; "I will never leave you."

"There," said Lotty, indignantly, "there, what a fine specimen of sisterly affection I see before me. Two fond and loving hearts separated, because you are so selfish, Charlotte?"

"O, O, O, do'-o'-o'-n't, dear Lotty!"

"Made miserable forever; perhaps they will both pine away and die, and then when Pro. is the bride of death, as novels say, what will you do then, you unkind Charlotte?"

"O, I am so sorry, I will say no more; dear Lotty! pray forgive me. Dear, dear Georgina, take my best wishes for your happiness."

"Now, that's a good girl. And when you see Pro. so happy, acting her very self in her new home, and doing the civil and polite to you when you pay her a visit, think how delighted you will be; and you will say to yourself, 'I consented to the marriage. Great as was the sacrifice, I helped to make my Pro. thus happy.'"

Warmed by this glowing description, Pru. dried her eyes, and permitted herself to be comforted.

CHAPTER XXII.

Philip Leigh no longer shut himself up. On the contrary, he was never at home. A master-passion had taken possession of his soul, under the influence of which the long nourished. flourishing plant of envy and malice withered and shrank until it appeared to die.

He kept up a semblance of attentions to Augusta. In fact, she demanded them, and was one of those helpless *exigeante* sorts of young ladies who immediately they see any specimen of the male species near them, become in instant want of a thousand little indispensable absurdities.

Philip would watch the woman-child with his quiet, thoughtful eyes, while he administered to Augusta's many little wishes, the non-fulfilment of which seemed to threaten her with immediate destruction.

"O, Mr. Leigh! I have been dying for you to arrive, and play billiards with me; and if you don't come immediately I shall expire with impatience."

"Pray don't, Miss Clare," returned Philip, "as I shall be under the necessity of acting chief mourner."

"And would you not grieve for me?" murmured Augusta, laying a stress on the personal pronoun, nominative case.

"I fear I should be quite insensible to anything, Miss Clare," said Philip, catching Lotty's amused glance at Augusta's delighted assumption of the one meaning, and utter unconsciousness of the other and more palpable one.

"Don't you think so, Miss Beauvilliers?" continued Philip, who never lost an opportunity of provoking Lotty to talk.

"You ought to be," answered Lotty, drily.

"And pray, child, what can you know about such things? You are as bad as Mr. Herbert with your 'oughts,'" said Augusta.

"As 'good' would have been more appropriate, Augusta."

"O! we are getting better, are we? We are going to church to early prayers ——"

"No, not going," said Lotty.

"I am sure I am devoutly glad to hear it," said Augusta, with as near an approach to a sneer as her pretty face would allow.

"'Tis as well to be devout about some things," said the imperturbable Lotty.

"But you are devoutly thankful for nothing, Miss Clare," said Philip. "Miss Beauvilliers only said she was not *going* to early prayers. Now she may have gone."

"O, the little Puseyite! Pray take me away, Mr. Leigh; I shall be contaminated. Little absurd Bear! I shall tell your father, and get you put into the corner." Lotty raised her eyes and looked at the fond old father. As she caught his glance, a look of such unutterable love and fondness broke over her face, that Philip was quite startled.

In a moment she was on the arm of the old cushioned chair, the large, loving hand was on her dark curls; she looked like a little pearl gleaming in the clasp of a grand, old, hoary Neptune.

What a protean little thing it was — never two minutes the same. Staid, womanly, and thoughtful in all that concerned her father; wild, laughing, and childish with Pru. and Pro.; clever, witty, and sensible with Margaret and Millicent; sharp, irascible, and sarcastic with Augusta and Philip; and in each and everything the most bewitching little fairy that ever crossed mortal eye.

It was a most lovely summer day, so much so, that when Philip appeared for his now daily visit, he found the whole party, including even Mr. Beauvilliers, out under the trees, all employed in different ways. Augusta called the visitor to her side, saying, "Mr. Leigh, I have kept this place for you."

Philip surveyed them all. Lady Katherine had a tree to herself, knotting away with diligent industry at what was of no use in the world, as she had already by her the life-labors of herself and daughters at this interesting work, almost all in an unappropriated state. Millicent and Margaret had the next tree, Harold half dozing on the grass by Margaret's side, and half interested in a French novel. Little Harold lay sleeping between them. No wonder, therefore, that Margaret's cheek glowed and her soft eyes sparkled — she had all she loved within her touch.

A little out of the line, but in full sight of Lady Katherine, sat Mr. Frank and the gentle Georgina, she pretending to knot, and he pretending to help her. Pro. was fast losing her name. Under the influence of the Beauvillian bonhommie, Mr. Frank had absolutely saluted his bride elect, and that in the presence of Lotty; but, however, no one told Lady Katherine. Pru., Augusta, and Philip were under another tree; not far from them was Mr. Beauvilliers's chair, on the arm of which was perched the Little Bear — Great Bear serving as a cushion for the old gentleman's feet.

Presently the Little Bear slid down, and pulling the Great Bear by his ears, with many fond and loving epithets, she so arranged him, as to change Mr. Beauvilliers's position.

"Thanks, my darling! — thanks! that has eased me greatly," said the fond father.

"How you do tease that dog, Lotty!" cried Augusta.

"Do I tease you, my Bear!" asked the childish Lotty, as she kissed him; and his great red tongue licked her little white hand.

Great Bear looked up a loving, intelligent answer from his deep-set eyes.

"Dear Lotty tease anything!" cried Pru., quite in a flush. "O, no, Augusta!"

"She does! She is the most thoughtless, heedless child that ever was! You did very wrong, Mr. Leigh, to trust your fine dog to her," continued Augusta.

Mr. Beauvilliers laid his hand on the pretty head. "Yes, yes; she is a naughty, unkind Lotty!" In the innocence of his heart he thought Augusta was as ironical in her remarks as himself.

"How will you punish me, father?" said Lotty, still in her childish glee.

"I think I won't love you, Lotty," and the little thing was instantly folded in that large embrace.

"Little Lotty," said Millicent, "I hope you did not get wet this morning; the dew was so heavy."

"Ah, me!" exclaimed Augusta, "the little Puseyite has been to church this morning."

"Did you think of your fond old father, my Lotty?" said Mr. Beauvilliers.

"Yes, father; you know I did."

"I know it, my child; but I like to hear you say so."

"O Mr. Beauvilliers! how can you encourage Lotty in such popish things?" asked Augusta.

"I am sorry if they are popish, Miss Clare; but my Lotty comes in to me from her early prayers with the fresh beauty of a young Christian surrounding her."

"And she is one," whispered Pru., as if to herself.

"Now, Lotty," said Augusta, "come here and confess: why do you go so early to church?"

"To say my prayers."

"Pooh, child! I know that; but what other reason can you give?"

"To get wet with the early dew."

"You are more bearish than ever, Lotty; but I see it is useless trying to get a sensible answer from such a baby as you are!"

"Perhaps I think you would not understand my answer."

"That is so likely, little goose! however, tell it to me; I must know."

"Then," said Lotty, standing erect before them, "I will tell you my reasons. In the first place, when I heard that Gerald was establishing the early service in the small village, and celebrating the saints' days, besides other things, I questioned to myself the propriety of his doing so."

"Dear me! how kind you were, and how wise you have grown."

"Pray hush, Miss Clare," said Philip; "I am very anxious."

"So am I, dying with curiosity."

"And I," said Margaret, "am also curious; I put faith in my little Lotty's reasons."

"But before I could pass judgment," continued Lotty, "I said to myself, that I must make a trial thereof. And I have done so."

"And pray what is the result?" said one and all.

"I think Gerald will not succeed in his wishes. The present generation are not that primitive race of former days, who, having but little labor on hand, gladly accepted any occupation for the early hours that were then kept. We can no more force upon the people of this age the religious services and duties that occupied their many leisure hours in earlier times, than we can make them use rushes for carpets and sheepskins for clothing. Healthy, active, honest industry is religion of itself. True, people may say, that such services occupy but half an hour in a day, and that it must be sweet to the laboring man to go to his work straight from his God: but he does not carry all that his heart holds dear with him; wife and children, or some part of his family, are left at home from necessity. Therefore, I think, if Gerald inculcated family prayer at home he would be doing more good. That is more fitted for the present day."

"Then why do you go, child?" said Augusta.

"Because," said Lotty, her large eyes growing soft and dark, as the shadow of sorrow passed into them, "I have a prayer to make to God ——" she paused, and continued low, "for a life that I love. And besides," she continued louder, "I like to run a race with the sun. I love to see his bright face gilding up the world, the little dew-drops just waiting to welcome him, and then imperceptibly vanishing. I like to feel fresh and free, as the young, bright day; and I like to take all my first feelings to God in his house. And the world is so beautiful in the early morning. Now, father, here is the round cushion, it is his turn now; and Bear, Bear, you dear old thing! turn yourself round."

"I think, Lotty," said Harold, rousing himself, "you made some sensible remarks just now."

"O, she found them in some book," interrupted Augusta.

"Indeed I did," answered Lotty.

"There, I told you so," exclaimed Augusta.

"And what book, little Lotty?" asked Millicent.

"It is before you," said Lotty, spreading out her hands, and looking with glowing eyes on the scene around them.

"I did not think you were so romantic, Lotty," said Harold.

"I was speaking for you, Harold," said Lotty; "just saying what you would say, as master and head of all here. And thus, Harold, you think of the Forest and all its loveliness. People talk of architecture and laws of beauty, and lines of grace. Take the arch of an avenue, and see if lordly man can build such symmetry of grace as that. When we were at Montagu House, Basil used to show us all the beauties of the Forest, did he not, Margaret? And so we came to love trees and Basil together, and both most dearly."

"I am glad to hear you say so, little Lotty," said a voice behind the tree. Lotty turned, and with a glad cry sprang towards the speaker. He placed both hands round her slight waist, and lifting her, as a feather, from the ground, kissed her on both cheeks.

"O, don't, Basil! remember I have left school," said Lotty.

"Is that any reason why I should love my little Lotty less?" said Basil smiling.

Millicent was in his arms; Harold sprang up with alacrity; Margaret gave him a sister's welcome; Augusta arranged her curls. Basil was a better *parti* than Philip; Lady Katherine was most gracious and benign; but all this warm, hearty welcome was nothing to Philip in comparison to the first one. A flush of rage made a strange, tumultuous beating of his heart; and when he saw the noble, expressive countenance, the calm, serene eyes, with nothing of the youth about him, but the fair, waving curls, all the manly bearing of fine athletic grace and power, Philip felt the wild demon of jealousy was running through his veins. The blood of the Leighs was hot and tempestuous when roused. He could have, shot like a dog, the noble specimen of a man that stood before him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Ah, Basil, why did you not come before?" cried Millicent.

"Yes," said Harold, "make a clean breast of it, my dear fellow, and confess why you have been so long in fulfilling your promise of visiting us."

"We have been expecting you with so much anxiety," added Margaret.

"I can assure you, Lord Erlscourt," said Lady Katherine, "your reception has been daily thought of, and cared for, though your unexpected arrival has not permitted us to show you this respect."

Basil smiled, and answered, "I had a very poor reception, I can assure you, Lady Katherine; for when I arrived at the Rectory, there was no kind sister to welcome me: no one, but a man, whom I supposed to be my brother, but who was so deeply absorbed in writing his sermon, that all he did was to show me the door, and direct me in the path to Court Leigh."

"But why did you not come before?'" said Millicent.

"Do you not know, Milly dear, that I have affairs to attend to, more than all children? The two boys had set their hearts on spending their holidays in the Forest with me. I can assure you we have had a merry time."

"They must be very different children to what they were, Basil."

"I am glad to say, quite so, Milly. In fact, I am so proud of them, that I half thought of bringing them down to see you."

"Pray, dear Basil, do so, their next holidays."

"But now, Basil," said Margaret, "you must be introduced to three people — Miss Clare, Mr. Leigh, Lord Erlscourt."

As Basil lifted his hat from his head, and displayed his whole face to their view, Philip felt inclined to curse him in his heart, while Augusta mentally exclaimed, —

"He is too beautiful for a man!"

The noble brow was shaded by almost feminine curls, so light and wavy were they, the dark blue eyes beamed with sweetness but energy, while a lingering shadow in them imparted a look of grave dignity to his whole countenance, that befitted an older man. But when he spoke, and this smile gleamed out, the laughing innocence of a fair, bright boy seemed to take the place of the older man.

"But where is the third?" said Basil.

"Here!" said Margaret, placing her boy in his arms.

Philip noted the instant change of countenance, the sudden shock, that made the strong frame tremble with its light burden, but as he looked it was gone. Whatever Basil felt, it passed away with the kiss he gave Margaret's boy, and his countenance was serene as ever when he raised it.

"I am no judge of babies, Margaret," said he, "only of rough, hardy school-boys; and I will show my two against the world."

"I am glad you have come now, Basil," said Lotty; "for we are going home in a week."

"I intend, Lotty, to beguile you and your father to my forest home some day," returned Basil.

"Will you go, father?" asked Lotty, eagerly.

"Yes, my best Lotty."

"And see, Basil, what a splendid hound I have."

"Beautiful; upon my word, he is superb! with him little Lotty, we shall have rare sport."

Philip's heart grew calmer as he witnessed the sort of childish behavior of Lottie to Lord Erlscourt; and when he left with his sister, was quite ready to join with Augusta in her praises.

"So handsome, so *distinguè*, so elegant," she said.

"So good, so noble, so brave," echoed a little mocking voice behind her.

"You little bear!"

"Then forbear, Augusta, applying such epithets to Basil. In looking at him, one does not think so much of his personal appearance as his character."

"O, if we are going to have a sermon I shall retire."

It did not take Basil many days to discover that beneath the polished surface of their life, there was a sure, though slumbering, volcano sleeping, that required but little to boil over; especially as Gerald confided to him, in glowing, lofty language, the supineness, indolence, and indifference of the squire of his parish; while Harold in his turn, dilated on the stern exactness, and almost rude interference, with which his rector meddled in his matters. It was no part of Basil's creed to make himself a go-between. He ever deemed it better policy for people situated as his brother and Sir Harold, to leave them to adjust their own differences; for where strong religious principles, conscientious determination of duty, were mingled with singleness of heart, and utter forgetfulness of self, the uprightness of such a character would make its own way, and bear down all opposition. This, Basil knew, was Gerald's character; and while he might lament that, with over-much zeal, he had created in Harold's heart a strong personal dislike, he deemed that heart too generous and frank to resist the good Gerald wished him.

But Basil was not aware how much the demon of indolence and torpidity had taken possession of Harold. He was more concerned to see that the gentle playfellow of his early days passed on her quiet way, content with the present, without fear for the future. In no one way was Margaret improved, but was sinking into a meek, inane character, with no feeling beyond what concerned her Harold. And he knew her in reality so different. Many episodes in their childish life rose before him, wherein her sense, her judgment, and endurance, all marked her as fitted for much more than the indolent life she was now leading.

"Little Lotty, Queen Margaret is leading a sad, useless life here," said Basil, one day to the little Bear, as she was romping with the great Bear.

"She only thinks of two things in the world, Basil; and that is what you and I are not accustomed to."

"No, Lotty; it was different when she was a little, wild school-girl like you. Have you not tried to reason with her?"

"No, Basil."

"Why not?"

"Her time has not yet come. I would rather preach to you, my Bear; you would understand me sooner," continued Lotty, to her dog.

Lotty looked up as Basil continued silent. He was in deep, painful thought.

"You must save her, Basil."

"How, Lotty?"

"I don't know; but you must try to awaken her from her dream of security. I thought one night she would perhaps show some emotion. Harold was not quite good—sometimes he is not—that is, you know he stays rather longer in the dining-room than he ought; he always does when Lady Katherine is here. As he lay with sleepy eyes half back in his chair, somebody that shall be nameless entered into conversation with him. I suppose she was more amusing than usual, for there ensued so violent a flirtation, that Lady Katherine swept out of the room, carrying Pru. and Pro. with her. I looked at Margaret; she did not seem to be taking the least notice. And when that somebody said, in a simpering, fawning way, 'I hope, dear, you don't mind my little flirtation with Sir Harold this evening.' 'Ah, no,' said Queen Margaret (for which I could have beaten her, Basil), 'it is so kind of you to amuse him.'"

"Did she feel no indignation, Lotty?"

"Well, she might, perhaps; but I'll tell you what she meant Basil; she would die rather than that any one should think Harold was wrong, or could do wrong!"

"I believe it! I believe it! Yes, I know that must be her thought."

"We are going to drive to-day, Basil; pray come with us. I will be charioteer, and I will take care to drive you to what Gerald would call 'some improving scenes'!"

Having seen both her Harolds so employed until she returned, that they would not miss her, Margaret went with the delighted Lotty and Basil. Margaret had not enjoyed such a merry drive since she was a school-girl. Basil was most amusing, with all his stories of everyday life, and what he did at home, looking so fresh, handsome, and animated, that, whether she liked it or not, the idea of a dark, silent, heavy companion, who usually sat there, was perpetually rising to her mind in contrast. Then Lotty's quaint little comments upon Basil's stories were so racy, that even he was in fits of laughing. They had no servant with them, and, whether from design or accident, Lotty was perpetually desiring to have something done to the harness. Basil would be out at the ponies' heads on the instant.

"Our servant is active, is he not, Queen Meg?"

"He is, indeed, my Lotty; how he springs out! it is quite a pleasure to see him. But I am so afraid that in doing it thus quickly he may get hurt."

"No fear," said Lotty, "otherwise I would not trouble him. But I have a mind to see how long a man, who calls himself a gentleman, will consider it necessary to obey a woman's will."

"I think you have tried Basil enough, Lotty; this is the sixth time you have made him get out."

"Yes, it is of no use trying this experiment on him, for if I were to ask him six times more he would be just as ready. I think I will try my plan on one of the lazy Leighs—eh, my Queen?"

"Then you will never get them to obey you," said Margaret, laughing merrily, as if Lotty was in a joke. "But go on now, Lotty, for Basil is up again."

They arrived at what appeared to be a ruined farmstead, nevertheless sounds came from within the half-roofed house: a few poor, miserable fowls were scattered about, with some gaunt pigs.

"Desirable place that," said Lotty, laconically; "I was thinking of asking for a glass of water, for Bear and me. Do you think we shall get it here, Basil?"

"I will go and ask, little Lotty."

"No, no, you will knock your brains out against the door. Margaret and I will go, if you will hold the ponies."

"I will accompany you with pleasure," said Margaret, "but I am sure no one can live there."

But it was inhabited. Sickly, miserable-looking children lay about the floor; a hoarse but feeble voice came from a bed, in a corner of the room, as they entered, and a woman, with a face of woe and starvation terrible to see, making Margaret quite shudder, rose before them.

"I came to ask for a glass of water," said Lotty. The woman sent a little child out with a jug.

"You seem ill," said Margaret.

"Yes, my lady, we are spent at last. After struggling all we could, the last misfortune is come on us: my husband is helpless with rheumatic fever."

"But how happens it, that with all this appearance of having been a large dairy farm," said Lotty, "you are in this plight?"

The woman shook her head, and burst into tears. The man called out from his bed, "It was a miserable hour, ma'am, when we came here. I was worth eight hundred pounds ere I took the farm, but see to what I have fallen, through the grasping hand of my landlord and his agent; they exacted the rent, which was high, to the farthing, but they did nothing that they promised. They gave me no help to drain my land, they let my barns fall, without giving me a stick to help them up; and the cow-shed was blown down one night, killing three out of six cows. I struggled as well as I could, but there is a curse on this estate; I am bound down by a lease, or I would have worked on the road to get away."

"Would your landlord do nothing for you?" said Lotty; "have you not told him of your condition?"

"I have told him myself, I have waited on him night and day. My wife went to see the lady, who seemed to be an angel by the goodness and gentleness in her face, but she had a hard heart beneath. She listened with shut ears; she did not seem to understand; she said, 'Sir Harold must not be disturbed, he was reading or sleeping;' and *we* were starving."

Lotty was too generous, and much too fond of her Queen Margaret, to turn and look at her, as the man continued a tale of woe and hardship, that few believed could exist on England's soil, but which may be the case under similar circumstances. Hard bargains of rent, strict exactions in demanding the same, are not so ruinous to a tenant as the want of his landlord's help to keep his home clean and dry, his buildings in repair and neatness, his gates and fences in order and use, his fields drained and manured. When this is the case, let the tentant begrudge his landlord no rent, but prove the value of his assistance by the punctuality of his payments. This is the true bond of union between landlord and tenant, and causes England to abound in estates, where the landlord lives as a king among those around him, while they bring up their sons and daughters to love and honor the bountiful hand that helps them, the willing ear that listens. While the landlord, on his part, views with pride and delight generation after generation growing up upon his estates, farms passing from father to son, the hereditary love with them: each strengthening the other, until they are part and parcel together.

As Margaret lifted the broken pitcher to her lips, the light fell upon her pale, agitated face. Lotty saw enough, while the woman exclaimed, "It is my lady herself, Lady Leigh!" In the confusion that ensued, Lotty escaped; her warm, loving heart could not bear to see, what she knew must be there, the first awakening of Margaret from her quiet dream of bliss, pictured in the hitherto smiling face.

"Ah! Basil, I fear we have succeeded too well! I would rather, — what would I not rather, than that she should have this bitter lesson? I would rather see you married to Augusta, I think!"

"Come, Lotty, I do not see why I am to be so severely punished for nothing."

"You deserve some fright, Basil, for Augusta told me last night you had all but proposed to her; and you know you must have given her some encouragement, she could not quite tell such a —— thing, you know."

"It is against my principles, Lotty, to find fault with a lady;

but in this instance I so utterly deny the imputation, that I really imagined the lady to be engaged to Philip Leigh."

"What do you think of that man, Basil?"

"I like him so well, that I should be sorry to see him married to Augusta. Both he and Harold have every element of good in them, but both seem some how to have suffered a defect in their education."

"Not so, Basil, they wanted early self-denial. There was no creed in their bringing up, that told them duty should guide their actions, even though no religious principles were given them."

"Is this my little Lotty talking so wisely?" said Basil, turning her face round to him, and looking into her eyes.

"O, don't! Basil," said Lotty, "I am no school-girl now."

"What wonderful eyes you have, Lotty! they are like a deep well."

"With truth at the bottom, I hope, Basil; but to return to the Leighs. Margaret would have been different in other hands; why did you let her escape you, Basil?"

"Hush! Lotty, hush! you show no wisdom in speaking thus to me of a married woman."

"Then I will go and talk to Bear," said Lotty, assuming her childish air.

When Margaret appeared again, they neither of them looked at her; Basil helped her in with kind assiduity, Lotty scolded Bear and ponies vehemently, and kept up afterwards a war of words with Basil. Again they came within sight of a ruined farm-house, with all its buildings in a more dilapidated condition than the first.

"Stop," said Margaret, the first word she had spoken; Lotty drew her ponies up on their haunches.

"No one lives there, Margaret," said she; "is it not so, Basil?"

"I will go and see," said he.

"No," said Margaret, "I must go myself."

"Ah, Basil," said Lotty, as she disappeared under the ruined door-way, "how her voice is changed. Have you been too hard upon her?"

"No, Lotty, with a disposition like Margaret's, nothing but the life she has been lately leading will hurt her."

Margaret returned, her face brighter. No one lived there, but the ruin of everything was sad.

In this way they passed many more homesteads, at all of which Margaret, at her own request, got out and visited them, each wretched, miserable and forlorn.

As they drove home, in a very different mood from that in which they started, nothing was said. Lotty did not even speak to the spirited ponies, or answer the wondering looks of her Bear.

As Basil handed Margaret out of the carriage, she paused for a moment on the threshold of her house, and looking at them both with the soft, dark eyes, full of expressive meaning and affection, said gently, but clearly, " Thank you both."

" She is saved," said Basil, giving Lotty an irresistible kiss of congratulation, as he lifted her from the carriage.

" Don't, Basil! you always forget I have left school."

Other eyes saw that kiss, two pair, one of which belonged to a heart that whispered to itself, " I hate Lotty, and I will be revenged upon her some how."

The owner of the other pair said also to himself, " Ah! ah! my Lord Erlscourt, it is your turn now, but mine shall come."

CHAPTER XXIV.

To all outward appearances Margaret seemed as serene as usual; but to Lotty, Basil, and Millicent there was a change.

" Where is Queen Meg?" asked Harold, one morning, with peevish vexation on his face.

" O, dear me! she has walked off, no one knows where," replied Augusta, " caring for no one."

" Very tiresome," said Harold, angrily; " she knows I wanted some letters written, and half a dozen other things."

" Dear me, Sir Harold! how can you expect a woman to be always running after her husband?" cried Augusta; " I knew Margaret's fit would not last long, as soon as she had old friends about her."

Harold's face flushed.

" I should think," said Lotty, looking up quietly from her book, " if you, Augusta, would give Harold the message Margaret left for him, you would spare him the trouble of putting himself into a rage."

" But, Lotty, it is so unlike Margaret to go away without telling me, or asking me," said Harold.

"I presume, from the peculiarly amiable manner in which you always beg not to be teased with foolish questions, that she was obeying you in this instance."

"I believe I am very cross sometimes; but really the weather is so hot, and the flies so troublesome, no wonder one gets bored. But what is the message?"

"It was given to Augusta."

"How do you know that?" said Augusta, angrily; "you were not in the room."

"I knew it from this: these are Harold's letters, all written, sealed, and ready to go, with their copies beside them; I am sure you were told to inform him thereof, and beg him to see if they were correct. Then by Harold's chair I see his little table, with his book, the two newspapers, his paper cutter, his footstool (as if you were some gouty old fellow, Harold); and all these show, that though some business might take Margaret away, Harold was not forgotten."

"You are a good little soul, Lotty; I must say, and very sharp too." So Harold seated himself lazily in his chair, continuing, "You can put all the copies into my drawer, Lotty, and ring the bell to send the letters off."

"Very well," said Lotty; "and if it won't fatigue your highness too much, I will read you the copies ere I put them away."

"Do, dear child," said he, laughing at her quaint gravity.

The Beauvillian visit was nearly ended. Philip tried every means in his power to gain an interview with Lotty alone: she was always in the midst of everybody; if her father did not want her, she was by Margaret's side; and when Pru. and Pro. could possibly catch her, they hung by her with a tenacity that made Philip wish them both deposited in that remarkable sea which, we suppose from its sanguinary color, always comes uppermost in people's minds on such occasions.

Mr. Frank had passed from the excited state of courtship into a raging fever of haste and eagerness to be married; and he was anxious to get home, to make preparations to receive his Georgina.

Lady Katherine would have besought a delay of six months for propriety's sake! but the Beauvillian ardor and enthusiasm knocked down Lady Katherine's arguments one after another, like so many nine-pins, and threatened to carry the stately old dame herself quite off the balance of her propriety.

"Dear madam, let them marry," said Mr. Beauvilliers;

"why keep them waiting just for a little punctilio? you know royal marriages don't take half so long to settle."

This master-stroke of his chieftain decided Mr. Frank's happiness, and his fever somewhat abated under the influence of preparation: but as for departing without his charge, that was quite impossible. So the day was fixed, much to the sorrow of every one; and only the day before did chance favor Philip.

He had joined Lotty, Harold, and Basil, in a ride that Harold had been induced to take, to see a wood that required thinning. Harold was already beginning to feel the want of money; and the prospect of having some wood to sell, that would ease his present care, spurred him to exert himself for once.

Exhilarated by the exertion, and the feeling of doing something, Harold agreed to go on a little farther; but Lotty wished to return to her father's early dinner. Philip offered to escort her home, with a sudden rush to his heart of tumultuous joy, while his outward appearance was calm as usual.

They chatted very happily for some time. Lotty really liked Philip, he was so amusing; and she gave herself up to friendly and familiar conversation with him, as she would do with Basil.

Receiving no answer to one of her sallies, she looked round and saw Philip with a face quite pale from internal emotion. He was thinking at the moment that his fate depended upon the answer he meant to make her give him ere the ride was over; and the possibility that she might refuse him blanched his cheek.

"Anything the matter, Philip?" said she. His Christian name passed her lips as much from surprise to see his agitation, as from a sort of habit she had of becoming familiar with everybody she liked.

"Lotty, Lotty, I love you," said Philip, "I love you to madness. O! Lotty, will you be mine?"

She reined up her horse full short. The clear, brilliant eyes looked full at him in astonishment, then, as if unable to bear the burning love expressed in his, so unlike their usual expression, she wheeled her horse suddenly round. With a smart touch of her whip he bounded over the fence by the road-side, and shaking his head with indignation, he fled in a mad gallop across a heavy ploughed field. They were over the next hedge ere Philip gained his senses.

"Wilful, wicked little thing!" he passionately exclaimed, plunging his spurs into his horse's sides, and following her; "I will make her hear me; I will have an answer."

Though Lotty never looked back, she seemed to know she was being pursued; for the next glimpse he had of her, she was bending over, examining the girths of her saddle. He could see her, gathering up the folds of her habit, and setting her slight figure firmly in her seat; then, with a clear, ringing chirrup to her horse, away they bounded, as if on a race for life and death.

Philip followed, his brows knit, his teeth set, determination even in the waves of his hair, while he muttered to himself, "there is the brook, beyond the long meadow; I shall catch her there." As he thinks this, again he hears the clear voice cheering her horse. They are over the brook, and are breasting the steep bank on the other side. He could almost hear the little hand patting the good steed who bore her so gallantly, and he felt half mad with vexation and admiration, as he watched the little gráceful figure bending so lightly forward to ease her horse up the nearly perpendicular bank. They are gone over the top, and Lotty might almost have heard the wind bringing the words, "Wilful, wicked little thing!"

As Philip reached the head of the bank, he saw the object of his pursuit far away, three fields off. A sudden pang of fear sent every other feeling from his heart.

"The quarry, ah! the quarry, she will not know of it. My voice is useless at this distance; she will think too that I but mean to frighten her. Ah! that lovely, exquisite, wilful being, is she to meet such a horrible fate?"

Philip spurred wildly on, shouting, though he knew it useless. As he looked, he saw the wild gallop restrained, the obedient steed was changing his stride into a quiet canter.

"Ah, she knows it! how could I doubt her sense and judgment? she sees some sign of unknown danger. Now, now then I have her, now will I make her answer me."

He did not see, as she bent low on her saddle, the furtive glances she was casting behind. As he dashed over the last fence with a wild cry of triumph, she stood still, as if waiting for his approach; but as his horse struck into his full swing gallop, she suddenly wheeled round, and passing within ten yards of him, bounded over the last hedge, which took her into a lane; ere Philip could pull up his half-mad steed, he saw her far away up the winding lane without the possibility of being overtaken, for she was leisurely cantering along, he was almost sure, switching the hedge-rows as she passed, and singing in the low, happy tone she was wont to do, in her childish moods.

The air might have borne on its viewless, but not voiceless, bosom sundry exclamations, the reverse of good or proper, until the heavy brow unknit; a happy thought had occurred.

"I will turn and go in by the lower lodge. If I spare not my horse, I shall be there before her; and as she emerges from the upper lodge, I shall catch her at the angle of the roads. Speak to her I will, and make her answer me, as the heaven is above us."

He was in time; Lotty was cantering quietly up to the junction of the roads. "Now she is mine." He thought it too soon; as she caught sight of him, she turned her horse's head in the direction of the walnut avenue.

"Where can she be going now? for that only leads to the flower-garden with the ha-ha before it, and the rabbit fence." He followed. "Heavens! she is not so mad as to think of jumping the ha-ha. I hear her speaking to her horse; she gathers up her habit, she is shaking the reins. Stay, Lotty, stay, it will be your death!"

A ringing, mocking, last cheer to her horse sounds in his ear, and Lotty is over, plunging about mid the flower-beds. He lashes his steed, determined to follow; but the wise animal swerves aside, and as he turns him around for another trial, he sees the "little, wild, wicked thing" dismounting from her horse; and giving it a parting switch of her whip, as a hint to take himself off as best he may, she disappears through the wide open window.

CHAPTER XXV.

PHILIP was down betimes for dinner, a flush on his usually pale cheeks, a fire in his generally quiet eye. He was determined to see how she would look on their meeting.

Lotty and her father were almost the last to appear; she, in her little white silk dress, with the cluster of fresh roses, so like herself, her only ornament. The rich hair was parted in its usual waving lines, the brilliant eyes looked round as clear and happy as ever: the pretty, fresh, innocent face, and the large loving hand on that shoulder, which showed a fresh dimple, with every movement; no change in Lotty. But her appearance was greeted by several voices, among which Augusta's was loudest.

"You are more of a bear than ever, you mad child; how could you ruin Margaret's garden in such a thoughtless manner?"

"Nay," said Margaret, "Lotty is privileged; she can do no wrong to Margaret."

"What on earth were you doing, you two? riding a race?" continued Augusta.

"It looked like it, did it not?" returned Lotty, quietly.

"Ah! Mr. Leigh, I am afraid you have been indulging my pet in her favorite amusement—a ride across the country; once set her off, nothing stops her," said Mr. Beauvilliers.

"I fully believe you, sir," muttered Philip, looking straight at Lotty.

A furtive smile of mischief played round her mouth, for which he felt inclined to punish her by making her hear his proposals then and there, before all the company.

"Indeed, Mr. Leigh," cried Augusta, "you really should be careful how you follow that wild thing. I saw, from my window, what a narrow escape you had, and thought I should have died on the spot."

"Very kind of you, indeed, Augusta," said Lotty; "Mr. Leigh seems too grateful to be able to express his feelings."

"But, my Lotty, you seem to me to have been rash," said her father.

"And would you have had me lose the race, father?" pleaded Lotty.

"Then it was a race?" asked Augusta, turning to Philip.

"Miss Beauvilliers said it was a race," replied Philip; "I did not."

"You little fibbing bear, come here directly, and tell me what made you ride in that mad manner?"

"When you see danger, don't you always run, Augusta?"

"Yes, of course, child; but how could you be in any danger with Mr. Leigh near you?"

"I was, I assure you; and as dinner is announced, I will give him leave to tell you all about it."

Lotty could hear Augusta from her end of the table endeavoring to extract something out of the now morose Philip, with no success.

Lotty always sat by her father at dinner, as his aged fingers, stiffened with rheumatic gout, were nearly useless. With Queen Margaret on one side, and her father on the other, no wonder Lotty looked happy and bright, and scores of times made Philip wish himself at home, out of reach of seeing or hearing her.

In consequence of this being the last evening, Harold left the dining-room sooner than usual; and knowing that some hearts were sad at to-morrow's parting, he chimed in very agreeably to Basil's proposal for some music and dancing.

"Come now, Queen Meg., give me some of your sweet songs first," said Harold; "it is ten days or more since you have sung me to sleep with your low, half-melancholy murmurings; and you know how I like them."

"But I do not," said Margaret, in her soft, but clear tones. "People that have everything they want, and have nothing to be melancholy about, should have heart-stirring, lively music, such as this is." And Margaret broke out into that brilliant gallop, the "Spirit of the Ball."

Basil threw his arms round Lotty's little waist, and was flying with her on the wings of the wind. Mr. Frank was whirling Pro. along with irresistible Beauvillian force, though she had not an idea of the step. Mr. Walter Beauvilliers offered his arm politely to Pru., who looked helplessly at her mother, who benignly said, — "Go, my dear." Lady Katherine was breaking out into quite a jovial old dame, and seemed so inspired, that her head, fan, hands, and feet, were all in a quiver of movement, as if trying to be off themselves: in fact, her whole appearance seemed so enthusiastic, that had old Mr. Beauvilliers a leg to stand upon, he felt he must certainly have asked her to get up and dance with him. And I have no doubt the old lady would have danced quite as well as her daughters. Philip, for a moment, stood with a thunder-cloud on his brow; he had seen an unmistakable look of intelligence pass between Basil and Lotty, as Margaret had answered her husband — a look of triumph and heartfelt delight. What could it mean? But Augusta looked appealingly at him; he offered his arm, and with his heart full of secret anger and disgust, he bore along his fragile and rather languid partner.

Harold apologized for not asking Millicent to dance, by saying he was afraid it would over-fatigue her. But Millicent would accept nothing but his arm, and bore him off. And now as they flew round the room, Lotty and Basil exchanged smiling looks with Queen Meg., the two Mr. Beauvillians bore their stumbling, blundering, breathless little partners round in a manner only Beauvillians could do, while Margaret followed her husband and Millicent with loving eyes. Then the gallop changed into the swimming, graceful waltz. Even Harold began with alacrity to dance to the Prima Donna.

"Charming to see young people so enjoy themselves, Madam," said Mr. Beauvilliers.

"I see no harm, I must say," said Lady Katherine, in a little liveliness; "we now and then got up a little dance at court, and then we would sit in a row, his gracious Majesty in the middle, with her gracious Majesty beside him, and the young Princesses would perform a minuet — the minuet de la cour, which speaks for itself, Mr. Beauvilliers."

"It does, Madam," said the old gentleman, in his most polite manner. "My dear brother," continued he, to Mr. Robert Beauvilliers, "do you observe her?"

"I do, brother," said Mr. Robert; "she is like a bird, a feather, a flake of snow."

"She has a pretty flush," continued the father.

"Lovely! my dear brother; I was at that moment thinking I had never seen her look so well."

All being now breathless, and done up as it were, the music suddenly stopped. Harold sunk exhausted, but in a fine flow of spirits, into a seat. Lotty had, some how, sprung from one step in the waltz to her father's chair. The two Miss Leighs were led, staggering and giddy, with their hair in such confusion as no one had ever seen it before, to their honored mother, who might have remonstrated, had she known in what possible words to do it. Such a thing as dishevelled hair was not known at court.

Then began Margaret the spirited song of "The Old Hound," which she sang with such gusto, that the chorus was taken up on all sides; and when the view halloo was to be given, it was done by every man in the room to his heart's content, accompanied with a little shriek of surprise from Lady Katherine. She had never heard such a sound before, and thought the walls were coming down; she grew grave, and observed to Margaret, that it was a pretty air certainly, but surely the words were vulgar — that is, not meant for such society; she had never heard of such a song at court.

Whereupon, smiling, Margaret said she would sing her one more ladylike, and calling on Augusta to join, they sang "The Elfin Call." Then two Mr. Beauvillians sang a duet, a fine, jovial song. Then they danced again; and Philip asked Lotty, and hearing that she was engaged to Harold, wished himself hanged, or at the deuce, privately; which it was, matters little, as he evidently did not mean what he thought.

In the midst of all this hilarity, the pompous, gray-headed old butler announced, in his usually grand way, "Lady Katherine's chair; the Miss Leighs's chair."

"What! already?" exclaimed Harold, in amazement.

Lady Katherine adhered to the good old fashion of sedan chairs. But they had their inconveniences; for though she might squeeze one daughter in with her, she could not two; and as, even in her son's house, she could not leave them behind, while the chair took her the hundred yards she had to go, she was under the necessity of having a chair for herself and one for the Miss Leighs. To be sure, after Mr. Frank's proposal and acceptance, her chair might have traversed the hundred yards a hundred times before the other chair followed.

There was such wrapping up of Miss Georgina, such a number of adieus, so many last words to be spoken, so many important things to be said, which had been quite forgotten until that minute; so many charges to Miss Leigh to take care of Miss Georgina. All these things took up time, and yet, notwithstanding all this care and all these charges, before Miss Georgina had time to say, "How polite and attentive he is!" and Miss Leigh to respond back in equally laudatory terms, as they trotted along, they have arrived, and lo! there was Mr. Frank at the door, ready to help them out.

And though this little amiable scene took place upon an average five nights out of every seven, still Miss Georgina was always so surprised to see him, and still Mr. Frank would say, "I could not have rested, dearest Georgina, and not known that you were safe under your mother's roof."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lotty was gone, and Philip was left behind, and nothing came of all that he vowed to himself should come, so Philip shut himself up.

There was copious and abundant weeping on the departure of the Beauvilliers; Georgina, of course, cried enough for ten, though lovingly assured by Mr. Frank, he would barely eat, drink, or sleep until he saw her again. Pru. was too sisterly not to join her. Though Lotty might have a tear in her eye when she bade adieu to Queen Margaret, she was very unsympathetic in parting with the others. Told Pro. not to cry her eyes out ere she saw her again, as it would probably be inconvenient to Mr. Frank to have a blind wife; recommended Pru. to take lessons from Millicent, in the proper duties of a clergyman's wife, which remark threatened to leave a permanent blush on poor Pru.'s nose. She told Millicent, that, good people being scarce, she hoped to see her taking more care of herself when they met again; also, hoped gravely, that Gerald would be nearer perfection, to which Gerald as gravely responded in the same wish. And then whispering a parting piece of advice to Augusta, not to outstay her welcome, Lotty took the little small nook that was left for her in the carriage among her father's cushions. One Mr. Beauvilliers inside with them, two Mr. Beauvilliers outside, with the two servants, and Bear the Great.

As long as the carriage was in sight, hats were flourished and handkerchiefs waved. Then, in a parting burst of grief, Georgina sunk on the faithful Charlotte's shoulder, and was considerately led to her couch. All of which was deemed by Lady Katherine truly correct and proper, and very courtly.

"Harold, will you ride with me to-day?" said Basil, after they were gone; "my time is so short here now, that while Gerald is occupied in parochial matters, I am fain to palm myself off on you for amusement."

Harold had just lifted up one of his beloved French novels, intending to ensconce himself in his easy chair. His unwonted exertions of the evening before had really made him rather stiff; but he was much too partial to Lord Erlscourt to refuse. "My dear fellow! with pleasure. I dare say the ride will take off my aches, too; though, unless I had the inducement of your company, I don't think I should stir."

"Ha!" said Harold, as they passed the same farm-house where Lotty had asked for water, "what are they doing here? They seem to be repairing the place. High time, too, idle, lazy rascals!"

"This is a wonderfully rich country," said Lord Erlscourt.

"I believe it is," returned Harold; "but the worst for tenants in the world. I cannot get any, and when I have them they won't pay, or they run away."

"What sort of steward have you?"

"O, a rascal, like the rest of them! There really is no honesty about this place, and I am sick of it."

"It is a lovely country," said Basil.

"I allow it is, and I believe I should be fond of it if I were not so harassed and teased. Lying on the grass among the flowers, looking at the fine old trees, from them to the gray, picturesque old house, with Margaret running about after her boy, I have often thought few could have a home so beautiful."

"I don't quite know," said Basil, smiling, "what harasses you?"

"Why, you know, when I left you, I intended profiting by your example, and looking after my affairs. My dear fellow, whether from design or not, Price, my agent, complicated the simplest matters to such a degree, that I grew quite sick of them. Then, the moment it was known that I was investigating matters, such a host of complaining tenants came about me, I was nearly mobbed; I had no peace night or day. Their demands were exorbitant, and their wants so many, that at last I gave up the whole thing in disgust; and as they one and all complained of Price, I thought the best way was to hand them all over to him, and they would be sick of complaining."

"Do you suppose he will act conscientiously by them?" said Basil.

"I neither know nor care; my rent-roll is £7000 a year, and he must find it; and as long as he does, I don't think I need trouble myself."

As he spoke, the tall figure of the rector appeared in sight. He advanced to meet them, glowing with health and apparent satisfaction. "My dear Sir Harold," said he, taking his hand with great eagerness, "allow me to congratulate you. Suffer me to say how delighted I am."

"At what?" said Harold, coldly; for, like all persons whose consciences will make themselves heard sometimes, he was only the more pertinacious in refusing advice. And like one angry dog meeting another, the meetings of Sir Harold and Gerald Herbert raised within the breast of each an instant spirit of opposition, as the dogs' pugnacious feelings raised their bristles.

"The Wilcoxes, Sir Harold; those poor creatures about whom I have spoken to you so often."

"I know nothing about them," said Harold, the bristles of his mind beginning to rise.

"Why, my dear fellow," said the warm-hearted, energetic rector, "you are repairing their place, you are roofing their barns, you have lent them money to commence life anew, and I honor you for it. I love you for rousing yourself at last, shaking off the dull, apathetic sloth that inthralled you like a coil of nets."

"I know nothing of what you are speaking about, and I'll thank you not to dictate a line of conduct to me," said Harold, interrupting him, with every bristle in a perpendicular state.

Had Gerald said, coldly and deprecatingly, "How foolish you are to repair that old place!" Harold was of that disposition, he would have ordered it to be done at any cost.

Now the well-meaning, but injudicious Mr. Herbert had raised a hornet's nest about him, and without in the least knowing how he could have offended, he yet was obliged to see Sir Harold ride off in a high state of wrath and indignation.

"Your brother-in-law is a fool," said he, at last, to Lord Erlscourt.

"He is injudicious, but no fool," said Basil.

"Did you hear all that rigmarole about apathy and sloth?"

"He is so active himself that he does not understand your *dolce far niente* character."

"I wish his activity would not lead him to meddle with me and my affairs; I wonder who has ordered the Wilcoxes' place to be repaired. That was it we passed just now, with the workmen about."

"It seemed to want it," said Basil, carelessly.

"I have no doubt it wanted it, and so does everything under that rascal Price's care; but I won't be dictated to by Herbert. I shall find out who ordered those repairs, and have them stopped."

Basil began talking of his intention to have a yacht in the ensuing summer. "In bringing up boys," said he, "I fancy it a good thing to let them see a little of everything. My half-brothers are fine fellows, but have a good deal of rather wild blood in them. I mean, therefore, to try the experiment of always keeping their active frames, and still more active minds, in constant exercise."

In this sort of conversation Basil so beguiled the time, that Harold became cool, and talked of having a yacht himself, with evident interest.

On the two ladies, Margaret and Augusta, retiring after dinner, Harold began instantly to exclaim—(Basil had seen that something had occurred to disturb the smooth temper with which they parted before dinner)—"Do you know it is Margaret who ordered those repairs at the Wilcoxes. I have no doubt that fellow Herbert set her on."

"I think he would not have greeted you in the manner he did if he thought it had been Lady Leigh's act."

"True, he did seem surprised, and also never mentioned Margaret's name. Erlscourt, I had a scene with Margaret, the first since we married. I did not know women could be so obstinate. But, however, I won't give in; I said the Wilcoxes' place should not be repaired, and it shall not."

"I do not think Margaret is obstinate; I have known her from a child," said Basil.

"So you did, and, by-the-by, I often wondered you never fell in love with her, Erlscourt. I did so with only looking at her, much less speaking to her."

"I did," said Basil, in a low voice.

"How! what?" returned Harold, rousing himself.

"From the time I was ten years old, until I was two-and-twenty, I loved your Margaret; loved her, not with a boy's affection, not with a youth's fancy, but as a man, who gives his heart unto the Eve of his Paradise, and sees no other woman, knows no other love, feels nothing but that he would be her Adam."

"This to me, her husband?"

"This to you, her husband. Now listen; from the time when, a little feeble boy, I ran twelve miles through the forest paths, more intent upon rescuing my sister from cruel treatment, than any fate that might occur to me. I recall that painful, weary journey, with pleasure — it introduced me to Margaret. The sorrows and hardships of my early years I learned to bless; they paved the way to my meeting Margaret. I watched her as she grew, month by month, year by year, gentle in spirit, but strong in love, pliant in small things, firm in affection. I grew impatient to take possession of this opening flower, and fearing that I could not control myself, I went abroad to pass the time, until her school-girl days were over. You came and gathered my cherished woodland flower."

"Dear Basil, I pity you. Had I but known, — no, I can say nothing; I feel I could not have given her up. My dear Basil, on my soul, I pity you!" And he held out his hand, his heart beating with emotion.

Basil grasped it cordially, continuing, "I knew her nature so well, that once her young heart was given, it was given forever."

"I believe it," exclaimed Harold, as the image of the fair young bride rose before his view, casting on him that one look of love and gratitude.

"So I gave myself for a task, the purifying my heart of love for her, so that it might be such as it ought, for the wife of another man. And you will not credit my first confidence, if you believe not the second; my love for Margaret is as that of a fond brother."

"I cannot but believe you, Basil, and I thank you for your confidence. I think you have a motive in it—tell it me."

"You think Margaret but a loving, rather simple girl!"

"She is loving, and, as you say, I think her more loving than wise."

"Then you must believe the word of a man, who so loved her before you ever saw her, that the innermost chamber of his heart seems shut forever. She is more, much more."

"I shall think with pride, Basil, of the love she gained in so noble a heart, even from a child."

"Then the object of my confidence is gained. Trust her, you will never repent it; consult her, you will have the advice of a devoted heart and clear head. Let her be your helpmeet indeed, and not the pretty, pleasant companion of your own hours of pastime. Before you both are set other tasks to do."

"I understand you. But, Basil, tell me this: is it true that your heart is closed against all love?"

"No, Harold," said Basil, smiling cheerfully; "against none. In my short life I have seen enough to know that protestations do not become weak man. Depend upon it, the more vehement and public his proclamation that his determination is fixed, and his will, like the ancient laws of Medes and Persians, unalterable, then heaven and earth, man and beast, everything and nothing, seem in a league together to make him eat his words."

"You never said anything more true; I am a living instance of it this day. For now you shall see if your lesson is thrown away, or your confidence misplaced. Queen Margaret," said he, opening the drawing-room door, "tell that rascal, Price, to hurry on with Wilcox's place, and get it finished immediately."

Margaret's eyes looked up, with that one never-forgotten look; but she only said, "Thank you, Harold."

"You are quite right, Basil," whispered he, "she is remarkably sensible; now, if she had gone off into heroics, and teased me with ecstasies, I, perhaps, should have changed my mind again. You saw that look! Humph, well! is not that worth something? Ah! my dear Basil, I forgot."

"Pray don't apologize," said Basil, laughing heartily at Harold's change of countenance from the exulting to the commiserating; "I will go and have a little flirtation with Miss Clare."

Harold was well content, and seated himself near his Margaret, saying quietly, "Pretty, striking-looking girl! but a poor compliment to pay Margaret, if he does choose her after all."

Basil had estimated Harold's character very justly. At present he was only valuing his wife according to the appreciation of others: she was the best, sweetest, dearest wife in the world, but nothing more. Now he looked at her to-night with, as it were, new eyes, penetrating and observant.

Augusta really needed a little consolation. Sorely in her heart dwelt Lotty's last words, inasmuch as she was quite aware that her conduct had been such as to make the hint desirable. That she must flirt was necessary to her existence — that is, she thought so. But in one or two instances, she had gone to such great lengths, that, spite of her beauty and elegant carriage, Lady Katherine had much ado to restrain the indignant feelings roused by her quondam favorite. It was not so much with Philip and Lord Erlscourt; but if they were not within reach, she planted herself by the side of the not always conscious Harold, and disported herself at his expense. Once or twice Lotty had made some sarcastic remarks, which only drew from Augusta the words, "Margaret does not care; what business is it of yours?" Augusta had, beside, the uncomfortable feeling of knowing that Lord Erlscourt was quite indifferent to her charms and manners; and she more than half suspected that Philip Leigh had abated of his loyalty. And while she tried to pooh-pooh the idea, that the odious little Bear had lured him from his allegiance, it would force itself into notice, try all she could. "Not outstay my welcome, indeed! I will stay until I have secured Philip Leigh, if it is only to spite that child, who, I believe, thinks he is in love with her." What means she used, history saith not; but that she met Philip most days, both Margaret and Millicent knew. And they were daily expecting the announcement of an engagement between them, when Margaret was summoned to her father's dying bed.

In haste and sorrow the party at Court Leigh broke up. Millicent and Gerald were left alone; for Lady Katherine had deemed it proper to have Pro.'s marriage celebrated in London. And the time drew near.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Any excitement that Philip had been undergoing through Augusta's instrumentality, was now gone, leaving a dull blank behind. Moody, irritable, and murmuring, the image of the little, wild, wicked thing forever haunted him.

"I will go," said he at last, "and demand her hand formally of her father — anything is better than this horrid state of uncertainty. If I am refused — I am refused; but I will be revenged."

Philip went, and was received at Beau-court in a truly hospitable manner. He was a Leigh, cousin to those Leighs who had entertained their chieftain, their girl, and their kinsmen so hospitably. It behooved the Beauvillians to show theirs in return to so honored a guest. Philip's better nature expanded under the frank, jovial hands of this hospitable tribe. Not a Beauvillian but asked him to dine, sleep, sup, live with him; and when, after three weeks' sojourn among them, any one had asked their opinion of Philip Leigh, every Beauvillian, from his heart, would have exclaimed, "He is a right good fellow." But a deep silence fell on the whole tribe, when Philip publicly and formally demanded the hand of their girl. They were like bees just learning that their queen was gone, and then, like bees, rushed into a frantic commotion. Not even her birth created a greater sensation.

"Our girl is asked in marriage," said one to the other when they met.

"A right worthy fellow," says the other, back again.

"She is young," says one.

"To be asked in marriage," says the other.

"But she is so sensible," says one.

"Yes, wonderful," says the other.

"Will she have him?" says one.

"She won't leave her father," says the other.

"I knew it," said both.

At Beau-court a full conclave was held; Philip in the midst, opposite Mr. Beauvilliers. "We duly appreciate your offer — we respect you, Mr. Leigh; but my little child, my pretty Lotty — I have not long to live, and I could not live that short time without her." Thus said Mr. Beauvilliers, and all his kinsmen echoed his words — "The child must not be separated from her father."

"Never! O, never!" said Philip, earnestly; "I will wait, wait months, years. I will leave my home altogether, and live only amongst you, if I may but hope."

"Very handsome proposal — very generous. How he loves her! Excellent young man! he deserves her." Thus exclaimed the Beauvillians, while the aged father clasped Philip's hand, and said, "Sir, that removes my difficulty. I own that I would wish to take to her mother the assurance that her little daughter was happy in the affections of a fond husband, as she herself was. I own that I should like to know my little one's likely lot, ere I leave her. Now it seems to me, sir, that I would rather give her to you than any one that I know; for you bear the name of Leigh, the name she likes so much; you live near the being whom she loves next to her father. If, sir, you can gain her affections, and if you will dwell here, with me, at Beaucourt, until I receive my last summons, take her, and, with her, my heartfelt, soul-breathed prayers for you both."

Philip kissed the old man's hand with deep emotion, and good and noble thoughts filled his soul, reflecting themselves through his eyes, so as to make the good Beauvillians think, as they gazed upon him, "he is worthy of our girl."

So she was sent for, innocent little victim, to give her answer before the scrutinizing eyes of her loving kinsmen.

She entered the room in her simple white frock, her large hat full of autumn roses, her great Bear by her side. She took her seat in an unconcerned and simple manner, on her usual place, her father's chair.

"My little Lotty, you know that Mr. Philip demands your hand in marriage."

"Yes, father," said Lotty, throwing a rose at the big Bear.

"We consent to the marriage, if you do, dearest one."

"I do not mean to marry," said Lotty.

"I know, my pet, you will not leave me. But Mr. Leigh will quit his own home, and settle among us, while I remain with my Lotty on earth; then I shall know when I am gone that she is in the care of a kind husband."

"I am too young to marry," again said Lotty.

"Young in years, my darling, yet old in thought and wisdom. But your fond old father would like to know that you had a home of your own, though I know full well every home amongst us is open to you."

"It is, it is — we should be proud — all we have — nothing should we delight in so much, as to give a home to our girl."

It was some time ere order could be restored; the vehemence with which every Beauvillian spoke from his heart was very nearly ending in a scene; for Bear began to fancy some one was about to hurt his little mistress.

However, order being restored, again Mr. Beauvilliers spoke: "Mr. Leigh seems in every way worthy of my Lotty, though perhaps we don't think any one can be quite. Then, when time carries you to your new home, you will live near your beloved school-fellow, Lady Leigh."

For the first time Lotty looked up, as if listening. "Don't you think, father, I am very young to marry?"

"You are, my child, and I should not urge it, but for the reasons I have mentioned before. I should wish to see you married ere I die."

"Do you wish me to marry Philip Leigh, father?"

"If you can love him, yes, my child."

Lotty lifted up those matchless, radiant eyes, and looked at Philip. He returned her glance, with the feelings so lately mentioned glowing from his eyes. "I will try, father, if you wish it."

Philip fell on one knee, and kissed the little hand half held out to him. "I desire no more — I will ask no more," he said. "Deeply do I thank you for the permission you have given me."

As the Beauvillians afterwards declared to each other, "The scene was beautiful; the young man behaved in the most noble, charming manner; and as for their girl ——" But such ecstatics can only be tolerated among the Beauvillians themselves.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MARGARET arrived in time to see her father alive, receive his blessing, and watch his aged eyes linger proudly on the features of her noble boy. Then, with his hand clasped within that of his wife, he said, "I think, Anne, we did well to let our Margaret marry," and so fell asleep, with the happy smile of content on his lips. A few words, only audible to that fond and faithful ear, "I feel at peace with God and man," were uttered by those feeble lips, and then they spoke no more. From sleep he passed into his immortal life.

Margaret and her mother mourned together, and the kind, ever-ready Basil took charge of Harold. It needed little on his part to increase Harold's esteem and affection for him.

At no moment of the day was Lord Erlscourt unemployed; and, as he seemed to count upon Harold's help and assistance in all he did, the latter found himself become unaccountably a man of business.

"My dear fellow," would Basil say, "you will help me amazingly if you would continue marking that plantation for me that we began yesterday. I have to be off twelve miles in a different direction to attend a county court."

So Harold would blaze away at the trees half the day, and get quite excited about the number.

Perhaps Basil would say, "Here is rather a difficult case to settle between the keepers and some wood stealers; will you, Leigh, kindly hear the matter over for me? They generally imagine I am interested."

So Harold would call forth his best judgment, and really looked like a pleased school-boy when Basil remarked, "How quick you are, Harold, at judging character."

Sometimes they would visit buildings under repair, so that during the month of Margaret's seclusion, rarely did Harold return to her, after a hard day's work with Basil, but in happier, healthier, more genial glow than when he left. And Margaret blessed Basil in her heart.

One day she said to Harold, "My kind father has left me fifteen thousand pounds; will you, dear Harold, take it, and use it to put our estate in some such order as this is?"

"I don't think we can do it, Queen Meg. The people there are so different from here. They are not grateful."

"They are very grateful, but they have never had cause to show gratitude to us."

"Well, Meg, I will think about it. Some how, I fancy nothing good at Court Leigh."

"Dear Harold, our home, the birthplace of our boy!"

"All very true; but there must be something obstinate and aggravating in the air."

Margaret laughed, and said, "O! if you are joking, I shall say no more; but I will spend my money as I choose."

"Ah! I see you find Hampshire air just as bad for your constitution as I do Cheshire. But listen, wife. I am about to leave you for a few days; Basil is going to Cowes, to see after a yacht he fancies, and if I see one I like, I shall buy it also. You won't fear letting me away from your apron-strings, with such a nurse as Basil to look after your big baby."

"No, no!" said Margaret; "but you will write often?"

"Every hour, I suppose," said Harold.

"I should like that; but I will let you off, and ask for a letter only every other day," returned Margaret.

"We are also going to make an excursion to see his boys, as he calls them. If they have been good, they are to go with us to see the yacht, it being principally for their amusement that he buys one."

"How good Basil is."

"Extraordinary, Queen Meg; and I have generally a horror of such sorts of kine; they seem to be a perpetual species of blister or reproach. But Basil is so fearless and independent, so daring, if I may use the word. He is first in all the night-watches we have been lately having, and does all those sorts of manly things; yet he is as kind-hearted, tender, and good as a woman — as you, Margaret."

"I hope he is rather more firm in character than I am. But when do you go?"

"To-morrow."

Harold kept his word for a few days, and wrote, as promised, very happy letters.

"I have seen the boys," said one, "those wicked little fellows that used to plague Basil's life out at Erlscourt, and you would not know them. They are splendid fellows to look at, rather of the gypsy or Spanish order; and then their love for Basil is quite wonderful — a word or look from him is enough. He must be an extraordinary character thus to have tamed down those two cubs. They make such a handsome picture, the fair Saxon Basil and the two Murillo-looking boys hanging about him, all looking one more happy than another.

"I have bought a yacht, and ordered her to be refitted and got ready for a summer cruise; also, I have determined to call her 'The Marguerite,' after some one whom I am not supposed to love much; or if you prefer the name of 'The Pearl,' write and say so — it expresses your name as well. By the by, I met your friend, Miss Clare, looking wretchedly ill. They say she has been jilted by Philip; but Philip writes and tells me he is engaged to your Lotty. I am afraid Philip has been a sad dog — and really, of the two, Miss Clare is best-looking, your Lotty is such a child. However, I cheered her up, and invited her to take a cruise with us in the summer. She did not seem to me in good humor either."

In another letter, he stated, "that Basil had also bought his yacht, and meant to call her 'The Ripple.' That he had attended a very gay wedding, the bride being Margaret's last remaining bridesmaid. I fancy," continued Harold, in the letter, "that is what has been troubling Miss Clare's nerves. Here you are, all married now, excepting herself, and she was decidedly the most striking among you in personal appearance. It required a discerning fellow, like myself, to select the flower from this flock. If you will grant me longer leave of absence, I intend to take a run up to London, to see Pro. married; and I have met a few old friends here also. I leave Basil to go home by himself."

Harold was absent about a month, and then returned to take Margaret home. His presence was necessary there, too. Matters had come to that pass on the estates of Court Leigh, that Harold's late trial of business, under Basil's tuition, was likely to be called into immediate and sharp requisition.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Though Philip was in the enviable position of Lotty's accepted lover, and ought to have been, and was considered to be, in the seventh heaven, he felt himself, at times, in just the opposite condition. The little, wild, wicked thing was wilder, more wicked than ever to him. Loving, dutiful, and incessant in her attentions to her father, merry, happy, and affectionate to all her relations, doting on the big Bear, to Philip she was a provoking, teasing, everlasting torment. He chafed and fumed himself into a fever, and then shivered and shook himself out of it.

"Lotty," he said, at last, in a sort of fit of desperation, "is this the sort of way in which you mean me to court you for my wife?"

"I never asked you to marry me; indeed I almost broke my neck to avoid paining you by a refusal."

"You did," he said, his eyes flashing, "you did, indeed; and I shall never forget your kindness."

"I never imagined, after that hint," said Lotty, quietly, "you would trouble yourself about me again."

"Trouble myself? Ah, Lotty, if you would but hear me. I would tell you that my feelings are ——"

"Stay!" said Lotty, "let us be serious. Do you mean really you are in earnest in your desire to make me your wife?"

"Good heavens! what have I done to make you think otherwise for a moment?" cried Philip.

"I did not imagine that a man of your age and experience would, in reality, wish to bind himself down for life to one so childish in every way, so deficient in all the requisite qualities of a wife. Nay! hear me out, Mr. Leigh. One also of whom you know so little; who has, in no way, returned your affection, who does not even wish to make the trial. Come, confess now at once that your fancy is over, and that you and Lotty will ever be friends, but not lovers."

Philip pressed his hand over his heart, which raged with inward passion, as he heard these calm, cool words. His lips grew white, his cheek pale.

"O Philip!" said Lotty, startled, "what is the matter; are you ill?"

"And it is thus," he gasped out at length, "that you consider a passion which is more to me than life."

"Nay, you must excuse me," said Lotty. "Remember, I have seen you with Augusta Clare. But I go to bring you some water."

During her absence, Philip gave voice to his passion, though alone.

"Wild, wilful, wicked, little thing, she shall be mine; hers is the spirit I have often longed to curb and break in. I will make her love me; she shall—madly, wildly, devotedly as I love even the shadow of her form, it shall be the business of my life to make her love me as vehemently. Hitherto, no love has entered her heart; as yet she is, as she says, a child. No matter; I mean so to act, that, with her father's consent, I keep my vantage ground here. But this strange, weary feeling at my heart—what can it mean?"

Lotty left him immediately after bringing the water, and Philip felt that it was as well, for his passion had overcome him. He had now to learn, if he had never known it before, that to nurse and cherish an evil disease in one's heart, must wear out that heart in some way.

CHAPTER XXX.

As has been intimated, the Beauvilliers were not so wise as they were amiable. Philip laid himself out to please them all, and was as devoted in his attentions to Mr. Beauvilliers as his dearest son.

The old man began to look upon and treat him as such; and while his mortal disease grew stronger, his mental faculties and discernment seemed to centre themselves more particularly on what was around him, than a more enlarged space. With Philip always at hand to insinuate his hopes and wishes, no wonder the fond old father grew to think that his Lotty's invariable silence on the subject, and unchanging manner, were assumed. Only for his sake was she thus driving from her the love of one he deemed so deserving of her.

In the waywardness of disease, he would have taken the matter in his own hands and settled it at once, but that Philip besought him not to hurry her. He would trust to time and her own wishes, he said, for which Mr. Beauvilliers loved him the more, without perceiving that Philip knew his best chance was patience. He saw sufficient determination in Lotty's eyes to make him fear that, even could he gain her father's orders, she yet might disobey him. He determined to sound her.

"Lotty, you give me no chance, you allow me no opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the woman I wish to make my wife."

"I think, Mr. Leigh," said Lotty, carefully intending to avoid irritating him as she had done last time, "that you mistake; we are always together."

"Yes; by your father's chair, or with others in company; but you never permit me to walk out with you in the early morning. Save one touch of your hand night and morning, you allow me not one single privilege that might be bestowed on your lover."

"You are not my lover," returned Lotty; "you cannot be; you and I judge differently of the love that should subsist between husband and wife."

"And what is your idea?" said Philip, eagerly.

"Look around you, and place before your mental vision all the married couples you know. See if, out of all, one half have not undertaken duties they cannot perform, sworn oaths that they all but forswear; let us not do the same. I know I am not fitted to be your wife; I have not that confidence and esteem for your character I must have before I can marry you."

"Why not?" said Philip, with a dark frown.

"You have not acted well by Miss Clare. I know by her letters that you have permitted her to think she has gained your affections."

"On my honor, Lotty, on my sacred oath, I have never done so," said Philip, ardently; "and tell me, do you like me so little, do you even wish to punish me so much, that you give me Augusta Clare for a wife?"

"No, no," said Lotty; "but I do not esteem the man who can flirt with another woman for his own amusement. Miss Clare has in reality very strong feelings when roused; and I am certain, that with real love in her heart, you will find her very unlike the person she has hitherto appeared."

"Never, never, Lotty! for Heaven's sake, name her not again in comparison to yourself."

"Then, Mr. Leigh, can you not perceive how frightful it must be to enter into so solemn an engagement without the boundless store of love, which needs large portions to be poured out on many emergencies, and yet lose nothing, but rather gain, the more the stream flows?"

"I have enough for us both, Lotty; my love for you is boundless as the sea, inexhaustible as the sand on its shore."

"Nay, Mr. Leigh, your love is lifeless without mine."

"Do you mean to say you cannot love?"

"Yes, but not now. I am too young—I must not be forced. Look at Lady Leigh and Mrs. Herbert; good, amiable, matchless as they are, in their wife's devotion, can you think they are as well mated as their virtues deserve? I would wish ever to look up to and honor my husband."

"Tell me what you would wish him to be, that I may try to learn."

"He must be so noble in heart that he would trust me as himself; he must be full of that confiding love and faith, so as to disdain to think of his wife as having a separate thought or heart from himself. Frankly, kindly, nobly must he ever judge me, as I would him."

"You are speaking of ——" Philip stopped as abruptly as he had commenced, his eyes gleaming.

"I am speaking of no one in particular," said Lotty.

"Well," said Philip, breathing quick, "if nothing that I can say of my love and devotion moves you, think of your father's wishes."

"Something has blinded my father," said Lotty, lowly and sadly.

"But you would obey him?" said Philip, eagerly.

"He has never yet asked me to do what I did not like," said Lotty.

And that was all he obtained in this conversation.

CHAPTER XXXI.

But Philip's suspense was shorter than even he, in his eagerness, expected.

One night Mr. Beauvilliers was seized with spasms of the heart. After hours of protracted agony, during which the pale little daughter, with eyes distended from intense anxiety into supernatural brilliance and size, never left his pillow.

Philip was incessant in his attentions, and gained many a look of gratitude, if not love, from those wistful eyes. With his strong arms he helped the ever-attentive sons to move the restless, aged sufferer; and no demand for assistance was made, but Philip was at hand to give it. In his devoted attentions to the father, he seemed to lose sight of himself and Lotty; and the loving daughter repaid him well for this forgetfulness of self, by her unreserved manner and quiet appreciation of his services.

Philip tasted, for this brief period, an extraordinary feeling of content and self-respect, such as those who act from a feeling of duty and disinterestedness must ever do. But the feeling was short as it was blest.

Towards midday, as Mr. Beauvilliers grew calmer, and longer intervals of repose were given him, Philip could perceive that his eyes often rested on himself and Lotty, with a wistful look. A wild hope shot through Philip's heart, that now, even now, was Lotty's last filial duty to be demanded and paid. No generous determination of honor and forbearance found place in that wildly-beating heart; she must be his, with or without her love.

"My darling, we had almost parted," said the dying man; "another struggle, such as this, and I shall be with your mother in heaven."

She kissed his pale forehead, so lately contracted with agony.

"My pet, let me see you a wife ere I die."

"O father."

"It will make me happy, Lotty."

"I am ready, father."

Philip heard the words, and with eager looks was by her side.

"Give your father this satisfaction, Lotty; I will not claim one moment of your time while he lives."

"Father," said Lotty, unheeding him, "what is a wife's duty?"

"Do your duty, my darling, but half as well to your husband as you have done to your father, and no wife will match you."

"What is my duty, father?"

"To be a helpmeet to him; to be his companion, friend adviser. All this I know you can do, Lotty."

"All this I can do, father."

"Then send your brothers here."

Mr. Beauvilliers explained his ardent wishes to see his children around him.

"I think I should die happier if I took with me to her mother the assurance that she is a wife, and settled. You, my sons, are all married, and, I doubt not, would each give your Lotty a home; but I should like to tell her mother she is about to make a worthy man happy, even as her mother made me."

A low murmur of approbation greeted his words.

"Then make preparation for my Lotty's marriage, by my bed-side. Tell our kind kinsmen, that 'the girl's' marriage is not celebrated as they, I know, would wish, but God wills it otherwise. They must pray for her happiness. And, Philip ——" here Philip advanced, his usually grave face and serious eyes lightened up with a joy and eagerness, that only confirmed Mr. Beauvilliers still more in the execution of his wishes. He looked long and earnestly at him, then, apparently well content, he said slowly, — "My child is a Beauvilliers, truthful, simple, just, and affectionate. Restore her to me unchanged."

"On my soul, I promise," said Philip.

As if well content, Mr. Beauvilliers fell into a calm slumber, his hand, so vast, yet so shrivelled and helpless, holding the little white one of the loving daughter. He heeded not that, unlike its usual warm, life-like touch, it was now passive and cold. Motionless she sat on his pillow, so still, so calm, so apparently bereft of life and feeling, she might have been a statue.

And the contrast was all the greater, from the hurried preparations that were going on in other parts of the house.

Some brothers went in search of the clergyman, others, with Philip, went for the special license; and such was the haste and despatch with which all worked, to fulfil their dying chief's last wishes, that by the evening every thing was in readiness for the marriage.

In the silent presence of many Beauvillians, by the quiet bedside of her dying father, Philip took that little cold hand in his, and demanded it in marriage; she neither looked at him nor spoke. Slowly she obeyed her father's whispered wish: "Go, my best one;" and leaving her place on the pillow, stood by Philip's side, with her eyes still resting on her father. She started as she heard Philip's distinct, and, as it seemed, triumphant voice, as he made the responses. She spoke hers in a voice like low, sighing music; and while "honor" and "obey" were words distinctly heard, the clergyman bent his head in vain for the one syllable — "love." He paused, but Philip impatiently beckoned him to go on; and, perhaps impelled by the extraordinary circumstances under which the marriage was celebrated, he proceeded with the ceremony.

As the last words were spoken, before Philip had time to claim her as his wife, Lotty was again seated on her father's pillow; the hand so lately dead and cold in his was once more nestled in her father's dying clasp.

And thus matters went on for three weeks. During that time she was never absent from her father's pillow more than five minutes at a time. Philip visibly gained ground in her estimation, by the devotedness of his attentions, and his apparent forgetfulness of any claim he might now have upon her. She seemed to be still as free as if no marriage had taken place.

But when the last words were said, when the last look was given, and the last sigh received, the wild burst of grief that broke from Lotty's heart appalled him at first. The depth, the strength, the fervor of her attachment, opened to him the true nature of her character, and he rejoiced in it. "She shall love me in this manner; I should die content to be thus mourned."

Many weeks elapsed before their beloved and idolized girl could be said to recover her father's death. And if anything could have reconciled them more than another to her hasty marriage, it was to see the gentle care with which Philip attended her, the devotion he paid to her slightest wish. He did it, it is true, from the purest feelings of love. Nevertheless, there was an old black spot in his heart not yet rooted out, that made him say, time upon time, to himself, "She shall reward me for all this forbearance hereafter." And perhaps he was not so skilful in veiling his true feelings to Lotty, as he was to her kinsmen: for she showed no increase of affection during this period of sorrow.

After a time, it was agreed that, perhaps, a change to her new home, and return to the society of her beloved Margaret, would prove beneficial in every way to her health and spirits.

The considerate Beauvillians refrained from trying her shattered nerves, by coming to bid her a personal farewell; but the trees and bushes gave shelter to affectionate eyes, watching the departure of the beloved one. Her eldest brother lifted her little light, faded form into the carriage; Philip took his place by her side; she neither spoke nor moved, until they came to the lodge. There a last group of anxious kinsmen were assembled. Lotty raised her head, the large tears rolled down her face; she had passed the gates, and with a passionate sob, she sunk back in the carriage.

Philip drew down the blinds, and wrapping her up closely, he folded one arm round her, then raising her face to his, kissed her once or twice, saying, softly: "My wife!" — the little head laid itself down on his shoulder, and after a few convulsions of grief, the sobs grew less, the tumultuous heavings stopped, the heavy eyes closed, and Lotty slept, like a little weary, worn-out child.

But Philip could hear the beatings of his own heart, as he thought that now this idolized little being was really his own, that he held the "little wild, wicked thing" in his close embrace, had at last called her his wife, and touched her soft cheek with his lips.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

Pro.'s marriage had been celebrated with all the ceremony and etiquette Lady Katherine could desire; though necessarily in a quiet way, because of Mr. Beauvilliers' precarious health, and Sir Thomas Montagu's demise.

The day was chiefly remarkable from other weddings, by the fact, that as the happy pair drove from the door, Pru. fell into hysterics.

Lady Katherine sat down and looked at her, in bewildered amazement. A sort of notion was running through her head, that the gentle Pru. was suddenly possessed by an evil spirit. She gazed at her in awe, and a remembrance of the old-fashioned picture, often to be seen in ancient Bibles, of the herd of swine, where numerous little black demons are discovered dancing out of the porcine mouths, beset her with a qualm of fear.

Luckily, ladies' maids are so educated, as to be able to take out a diploma in the matter of hysterics; and two or three of them having administered the usual amount of pattings, scoldings, coaxings, poor dears, and sal volatile, to Lady Katherine's infinite relief, no further catastrophe happened, but that Pru. was put sobbing to bed.

Everybody was settled in his and her proper home. Margaret and Harold at Court Leigh; Lady Katherine and the hysterical Pru. at Roseleigh; Millicent and Gerald at the Rectory.

The first smile that Philip saw on his wife's face since the death of her father, was brought into being by Pru. She saw the carriage pass the window, on its way to Court Leigh, whither Philip was taking Lotty for a drive; and, in the excitement of her feelings, she ran out, just as she was, without bonnet or shawl, and throwing her arms round Lotty, as she descended from the carriage, exclaimed, "Dearest, darling Lotty! I am so glad to see you!"

Lotty duly appreciated the warm affection displayed, in a manner unprecedented on the part of a Miss Leigh; and while she returned the embrace, had almost her usual manner; especially when, picking up Pru.'s knotting, it was discovered that though the knotting was there, the other end, all unwound, was to be traced all through the garden, losing itself in the window, out of which Pru. had sprung with such loving activity.

Margaret and Millicent could have wept over the change in their little wild Lotty; but the least show of feeling on their part only made the lips turn white as the cheek, though no word passed them, no tear of relief dimmed her bright eyes. They saw she was struggling with her sorrow, but with a resolute heart to conquer it; and only did they show their perception of her efforts, by the ready love and affection with which they promoted all sorts of schemes and pleasures to amuse her. Philip seemed to have no pleasure, no business, no thought, independent of Lotty; and appeared to live but to administer to her wishes.

From the first week after their arrival, they were visited now and then by one of Lotty's brothers or uncles; who, long as the journey was, never said why they came, or what made them go away the next day. Philip's hot temper was beginning to chafe, under what he considered a surveillance. Lotty may have perceived it, for she begged the last one who came, to entreat the others to be at ease about her. She would write constantly; she was strong enough now to ride and walk about. They could see that she was gradually, though slowly, recovering her health and spirits; and the good Beauvillians, thinking it but natural that Philip should be assured that he had not married the whole family, took leave of their Lotty, and left her, in the confidence of their fine natures, to the husband her father had selected for her.

But Lotty was to write; O, yes, Lotty must not let one week pass without writing. And her nurse, who had lived with her from the hour of her birth, now her maid, was to write too. And so Lotty began her new life.

Harold was changed, and very much for the better too, in all, excepting one thing, and that the most important — his dislike to Gerald Herbert increased. He went to church only to scoff and rail at the preacher; only to murmur and find fault with what he called the "canting parson."

Margaret would endeavor, in her gentle, persuasive way, to point out the beautiful truths, the lofty hopes, held out in Gerald's eloquent words; the rigid self-denial of his life, the uncompromising zeal with which he performed his duty; the truth with which he acted his favorite text, namely, "I am willing to spend and be spent for you." With the perverseness of a mind that would persist in its wrong judgment, he would not even give Gerald credit for what he deserved.

A poor, simple-hearted curate, with plain words and homely truths, was more suited to Harold's state of mind, than the gifted, almost inspired Gerald; and for this reason: Harold's heart, as regarded religion, was as a little child's; the "strong meat" he could not yet bear — the "milk of the word" was alone fit for him at present. And being unable to bring his gaze up to the level of Gerald's heaven-seeing eyes, he took refuge, as many men have done before him, in despising what he could not understand.

Gerald, on his part, had forgotten, that "he must be all things to all men, if by any means he might save some." Schooled and exercised as his own heart had become, he no longer remembered the weaknesses of man's nature, but deemed a duty undone, a fault committed, as so many commandments broken or forgotten; and "the eye must be plucked out, the hand cut off," ere the sin could be forgiven. No latitude was allowed, no fault considered venial, no excuse was deemed valid. Perfection was his aim; and this to a man whose education had been based on no religious principles; this to a congregation who were ignorant of the commonest duties of Christianity. No wonder that the rector was more feared than loved, more wondered at than respected.

It was different with his wife. She taught the holy truths that her husband wished to force on his people by example; and a word from the gentle lips of his wife proved often more persuasive than Gerald's most eloquent appeal. Neither Harold nor his people were ready or fitted to strike at once into the high path of duty pointed out by their rector.

Lady Katherine, though considered a religious woman, had lived for the most part of her life in those times where a regular attendance at church, spending the Sunday in reading sermons and good books, taking the Holy Sacrament twice a year with the due amount of preparation required by the little manual called "The Week's Preparation," caused her to be considered very devout. And, as we have intimated, she was not naturally gifted with sufficient perception to distinguish a habit from a duty. She had been called a religious woman; she considered herself one. To be told she was a sinner, poor, naked, blind, and helpless, was repugnant to her feelings, contrary to every idea she had been indulging in for nearly seventy years. So she joined with her son in disliking, not to say despising, their new rector.

Margaret and Millicent patiently hoped for the best; trying, in their loving woman's nature, to soften all ruggedness, all bushes and briars in the paths of their lords.

Harold really exerted himself. At first matters went on very well. It was agreeable to go to different farm-houses with his agent; order them instantly to be repaired; have the heartfelt thanks of the tenants, and the tearful blessings of their wives, poured upon his doings. Also, he was interested in plans that were submitted to him, and, the weather not being as yet very hot, he rode about and watched their progress in execution; and was pleased with himself when he suggested improvements, and they were deemed worthy to be carried out. Tiresome as Price had been, yet as Sir Harold now seemed determined to look after his own affairs, no more impediments were thrown in his way. All seemed to go on delightfully smooth and pleasant. Basil was duly informed, by the self-pleased Harold and the delighted Margaret, of the happy state of affairs; and was besought to come and see the effects caused originally by him alone, and to assist with his further advice.

But Basil knew the besetting sin of the Leighs. Harold must reform himself by sure and slow degrees. Dependent upon another, the cure would never be complete.

That he had some annoyances to contend with, Margaret expected; and, though Harold fretted and fumed about them, they were not of so grave a nature as to cause any serious interruption So summer came on apace, and with the green leaves came fairer hopes.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Lotty was once more herself, and Philip, as he watched her playing like a very child with her great Bear, wondered at the intense love that burned in his heart for that little wild thing. And did she love him? This question he asked himself, day and night, hour by hour, and he could not answer it.

Happy, frank, and unrestrained as ever, the butterflies of the hour seemed not more free from care, more intent upon being satisfied with whatever flower came in their way.

Fond terms of endearment were showered upon Bear, caresses and loving words to Margaret, merry, mirthful ones to Pru. What to him? He knew not, he could not tell, he could not define her feelings towards him.

He had but to express a wish; she said, "Yes, Philip," and it was done. Did she intend riding, and he said he wished to walk, she would come down in her walking dress, having taken off habit and hat on the instant. Did he but hint at an alteration in house, garden, her dress, her words; even though he might be hardly conscious that he had said it, yet it was done.

But what mattered all this to him; what mattered it, that he had secured the prize he took at any price, if, after all, he did not gain her love? The old sin was rising fast in his heart, but in a new form. The long-concealed, though still flourishing, plant of discontent and envy, that he had so nourished and fostered from his youth, and which had apparently died when all food was taken from it, was beginning to sprout again. He envied Bear the fond words bestowed on him; he hated to see Lotty going about with Margaret's arm around her. He wanted no one to have part or parcel, or aught to do with his property. She might not love him (he had braved the chances of marrying her without), but she was his — his property, goods, chattels. If she would not love him, she should not love anything else. But he meant to make her love him. He was but waiting an opportunity to begin his operations.

Philip Leigh resembled his cousin in the disregard, not to say indifference, he paid to religious duties. This is often the case with men whose vigorous intellect and quick talents smother the less striking qualities of plain sense and calm judgment. Whatever his inquiring mind had led him to study and examine on this vital subject had hitherto rather tended to confirm his scepticism. A little more (nought but the pitying love of some ministering angel, sent by an all-merciful God, kept one little spot, half awe, half fear, in his heart), and Philip Leigh would have been an infidel. He very seldom went to church; once or twice he had tried to prevent Lotty going there. But she, so quick to hear his least wish, so observant of all his hints, took no heed on this subject. So he thought he would express himself more strongly.

"Lotty, I want you to stay at home to-day to read to me," said he.

"I am going to church, Philip."

"But do you not hear me say I wish you to stay at home?"

"Then you must wish still, Philip, for that is all you can have now. When I return I shall be ready to do what you require."

"Come, Lotty, don't be childish. I am not in the habit of asking, to be refused."

"Do you never go to church, Philip?"

"Very seldom, little one. I do not see what men, in the full possession of their wits and faculties, want to gain by going here."

"They should go to thank God for that gift of their wits and faculties."

"Pooh, Lotty! I was born with mine."

"You believe in no God, then, Philip?"

"I am afraid I am a sad, irreligious dog, sweet Lotty," said he, half smiling to think he had gained his end.

She looked at him with a strange expression of pity in her face.

"I go then," she said, "to pray for you," and left him; taking the path to church.

He was too much surprised, not to say ashamed, to stop her; but he determined to be revenged. When she returned, she found him in the same place she had parted from him. In her usual gay and innocent manner she came up to him as if nothing had occurred, showing him Bear all wound round with a wreath of wild briony; she gave Philip some violets, and then said, "Now where is the book?"

For a moment there were in Philip's mind better thoughts and a conviction that if he wished to gain the love of this little precious heart, it must be by actions and thoughts as pure and bright as her own truthful eyes. But no, Philip's heart was not capable of good and noble thoughts — he must be revenged; and if she would not love, she should fear him. So he said, "No, I thank you. I wish for no forced duties."

"Very well," she said, without appearing to see his taunt. "Then, Bear, come with me to get some more violets."

Philip grew pale with anger, and he said, in a loud voice, "Stay where you are."

She took off her bonnet and shawl, and without looking at Philip, sat down with a book.

"Do you not see that you have annoyed me?" said he at last.

"Yes, I see it."

"Then why do you not ask my forgiveness?"

"I request your forgiveness."

Philip bit his lips with anger, but knew not what to say.

"Ah! Philip," said Lotty, at last, in a cordial, happy manner, "we are like two babies; we shall never earn the flitch of bacon Margaret has promised us." Then assuming a more serious look, with a quiet, dignified manner, she continued, "I have much for which to thank God; much for which I have to pray. Sickness or death shall alone prevent my going to church. Let us have no further dispute on such a subject." She put her hand into his, almost the first unsolicited mark of familiarity she had ever bestowed on him.

Madly as he loved her, irresistible as seemed the inclination to clasp her in his arms, and utter the burning cry of his heart, "Love me, Lotty, O, love me!" he was foiled, and could not forgive her. He said coldly, "Your first duty is to your husband."

She turned away; he could see a little shadow of disdain in her eyes, but she did not answer.

No more was said that evening; but as she was preparing to go to Court Leigh in the morning, he said, "You are always at Court Leigh! cannot you stay at home one day?"

"We are both engaged there, Philip, to meet my old school-fellows, Carry and Flory."

"I do not choose to go."

"Very well."

Lotty took off her bonnet, wrote a note, and rang the bell.

"Let me see that note," said he. He read it; and his heart smote him as he read the simple excuse to Margaret, which contained no implication of himself, and was written in her lively, happy spirit, rendering it all most natural their not going.

"You may say we will come to-morrow."

"Thank you, Philip."

If Philip thought he had punished her, he could not be certain of it; as Lotty was her usual happy self all day.

He was not sorry that Margaret came, in spite of the excuse, and carried them both off by force to dinner.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Caroline and Florence appeared before their school-fellows, as they did to them, in very different circumstances to those in which they parted.

Margaret and Caroline were mothers; Millicent looking forward to such an event. Florence and Lotty, brides.

Caroline's husband was a good-tempered, fox-hunting, rather vulgar 'squire, of moderate fortune, who loved his pretty wife next to his horses and dogs, and thought her highly flattered by the compliment. She seemed equally pleased at her position in her lord's affections, for her own were almost wholly absorbed in a pale, flabby species of baby, with tottering head, weak neck, and watery blue eyes of large dimensions.

What this baby ate and drank, when it slept and how it slept, when it went out, and where it went, with various other interesting items, formed the sole food for her thoughts, the sole exercise for her tongue.

When Lotty brought down, after dinner, Margaret's magnificent boy, his little figure so erect, and his beautiful face so blooming and intelligent; he formed a sufficient contrast to the little stranger as to call forth an abrupt remark from the young 'squire, rather to the detriment of his own child.

"Ah!" said Margaret, quickly, seeing the flush of mortified anger rising on the young mother's cheek, "my boy is almost a year old."

"And pray, Sir Harold," continued the 'squire, whose name was Royston, "have you had any peace since his birth?"

"I don't see the little fellow very often," said Harold, "and I never hear him, so I suppose I must consider myself fortunate; and that he is a very good child, inheriting all his father's amiability."

"He is of a more enterprising and active nature than you, Harold," said Lotty; "for he took incredible pains to scramble up on to a chair a day or two ago."

"That's just what my baby does," said Mrs. Royston, eagerly; "he feels his feet already, little pet!"

"I conclude he is feeling something," said the hard-hearted father, "otherwise how can you account for those extraordinary faces?"

"Nonsense! Robert," said Mrs. Royston, angrily; "that's only a way babies have of smiling."

"It seems to express the reverse, to my thinking," retorted he.

At that moment, little Harold's wondering and wandering eyes, that had been travelling from face to face, among the new comers, caught a glimpse of his father. A little radiant gleam of smiles shone over his whole face, he stretched out his arms, and quivering in every limb with delighted impatience, he expressed, in baby language, his wish to go to him.

"Ah! now, that I call an unmistakable smile," said the pertinacious 'squire. "I wonder, Carry, if your baby will ever be as nice a one as that?"

"I am sure I don't know what you mean, and I don't care either. If my little darling has an unnatural father, it is his mother's duty to make it up to him." And slight symptoms of a disposition to weep afflicted Mrs. Royston.

"I should think," said Margaret, with a voice like angels' music, "that when your boy is the age of mine, Mr. Royston, you will be quite satisfied with him."

"He doesn't deserve to have such a child," was muttered by the injured mother.

"It is a great disadvantage," continued Margaret, hoping to drown the last sentence, "for so young a child as yours to be seen by the side of a young John Bull, such as my boy." As he heard his mother's voice, the young John Bull called out her name, and with all his child's love beaming in his face, he held out the strawberry his father had given him for her acceptance.

Mrs. Royston retired to the drawing-room with the other ladies, in an aggrieved state; and while she poured forth into Margaret's ear all she endured from Mr. Royston's unfeeling conduct, mixed up with an account of her baby's extraordinary mental and bodily accomplishments, Florence was favoring Lotty with a private view of her trousseau. Her husband was a mild sort of fair, soft young man, without any very particular ideas upon any subject, which was fortunate, as Florence had decision enough for both. He was the junior scion, as well as junior clerk, of a large banking establishment, so that while Florence spread out her wedding-veil, looking at it with loving and admiring eyes, sometimes shaking it up into a fall of lace, then spreading it out, after the most approved milliner fashion, she told Lotty of all their expectations.

"We are to have £800 a-year now, my dear, and little enough too, considering the house Frederick works in. Rich! my dear, rich does not express what they are. Literally, they might eat gold. I went one day into the Bank with Frederick, just for curiosity; and, my dear, the bank-notes would have covered this floor, and heaps of gold lying about, just as if nobody cared. But the clerks stared so, I could not look much, I was so afraid Frederick would see them, and be angry. I had on a purple merino, and a white chip bonnet, with poppies and corn trimmings — most elegant, I can assure you, my dear Lotty. But, I forget, you never cared much about dress."

"No, not much," returned Lotty.

"Then it is time you should, my dear. Now you are a married woman, you must study dress to please your husband. A man always likes to hear that his wife is the best dressed woman going, and I shall make a point of indulging Frederick in this wish. I shall consider it my duty."

"I hope he will be duly grateful," said Lotty.

"O, yes; that he will, or I'll know the reason why. You see I have only two 'moirés' at present; mamma would not give me another, but I will have a black one, I am determined.

All married women wear black. By the by, my dear, what a handsome man your husband is! Now, I should like to have a dress just the color of his hair — a rich black. I wonder how he came to fancy a child like you?"

"So do I," said Lotty, quietly.

"Is he kind to you, my dear? He did not look to me very good-tempered; he seemed to me as if something had put him out."

"Perhaps he was thinking it was a pity he had not seen you before he married me."

"Ah, ha! very likely; but you were always a good little soul, Lotty; and Frederick says, never, not even at the Opera, with all that sea of lovely faces round him (that's his own expression, mind, and very pretty too), did he see one to compare to mine."

"You are very much improved, Flory, since you left school."

"Ah, my dear! I must allow dress makes a vast difference: one can dress so sweetly now, there are such loves of things; look, now, at this head-dress — By the by, did you notice Carry's to-day, at dinner — put on all on one side? I dare say she was wishing her baby good-by ere she parted from the cherub to come down to dinner, and never looked at herself in the glass. Now, if I had fifty babies, I should think it just as necessary to pay every attention to my personal appearance as if I had none."

"Rather more so, I imagine," said Lotty.

"Exactly; now you are reasonable, Lotty; but as for Carry, she is baby-mad. And did you ever see such a dowdy as she has become? Two or three more children, and I don't know what she will look like. But that's the worst of you little people," continued Flory, looking with satisfaction from her own tall, rather angular form, to Lotty's *petite* one.

"It's very shocking, certainly," said Lotty.

"But my dear, you have not half admired this white muslin, with the gold corn. And now, you see, having shown you all my things, it is but fair that I should see your trousseau."

"I did not have one," said Lotty.

"Not a trousseau!"

"No," said Lotty, composedly.

"Good heavens, child! Then how were you married?"

"Under very painful circumstances, Flory; so we will say no more about it."

"Yes; I know my dear that you had to be married in a hurry, and by your father's bed-side. I remember hearing how your uncles, and brothers, and Mr. Leigh, were rushing everywhere to get the special license; and I was thinking myself I should like to be married that way too. But, of course, married by special license, I concluded you would have diamonds, or pearls at least, and Mechlin lace, and all the things proper."

"No," said Lotty. The remembrance of the scene sent a rush of mournful regrets to her heart; but she knew her present auditor was wholly incapable of understanding that deep well of never-dying sorrow — so she continued, in her usual unconcerned voice, "I was married in my old brown merino frock, that you have often seen at school."

"My heavens! and married by special license!" exclaimed Flory. "Poor soul! But surely you had a trousseau provided for you afterwards?"

"Yes; of black, with crape and broad hems."

"Dear me, how shocking? Are you superstitious, my dear? — for if it was me, I should not know a moment's happiness; I should feel perfectly certain that the match would turn out a miserable one."

"If it does," said Lotty, "I will come to you for consolation."

"Do, my dear, you shall have my best efforts; and, in the mean time, take this advice: don't pin your happiness on any man. I told Frederick from the very first I was no weak fool, ready to give in on any occasion; but I had likings and dislikings, whims and weaknesses, and, like all other mortals, I was entitled to my share of indulgences. Now, look at Margaret; I believe she quite fears Sir Harold, and she has next to no power over him. By the by, how fat and bloated he has grown — and such an elegant young man as he was, with such a fine dark eye ——"

"I always thought he had two," interrupted Lotty.

"Of course he has; you are as matter of fact as ever, you little, odd thing! Do you remember how mad Augusta was when she discovered that it was Margaret he wanted to marry, not her? Ha, ha! how we laughed, Carry and I, it was such good fun her being so disappointed. Then, what do you think? — she wrote and told us she was going to be married to your husband. By the by, Lotty, she is most bitter against you."

"She is coming here next week," said Lotty.

"I am delighted to hear it. I shall show her all my things: she really has good taste in dress; and, besides, how she will envy me! It has always seemed strange to me that she does not marry."

"She is very handsome," said Lotty.

"Yes; and very striking too; but she is such a shocking flirt—she goes such lengths. Really mamma was about to order me to have nothing further to say to her, she lost her character so completely last summer at Ryde. She is a pretty good age now; the oldest of us all, save Millicent. She has a shocking temper, and agrees with none of her family; they despise her, and she hates them. But I must show you my pink *glacè*, with silver trimmings, and such a spray, my dear, for the hair."

But Lotty, declaring that coffee would be announced, departed down stairs, and concluding, from Margaret's look, that she had had a dose of talk similar to her own in interest, called upon her to come and sing. Their sweet voices rose and fell in rich harmony, beguiling the gentlemen from the dining-room.

"My dear," whispered Florence to Lotty, "I mean to devote myself to studying your husband's character for an hour; I am a great judge of such things, and rarely mistaken; and being such a little, young, inexperienced thing, I may be able to afford you some good and sensible advice as to his management."

"I feel very grateful," said Lotty, smiling.

"Ah! depend upon it, my dear, I shall be able to do you a great deal of good."

Florence made only one discovery in the hour that she kindly devoted to the study of Philip's character. He never willingly withdrew his eyes from Lotty's face, and he never lost a single word that fell from her lips; nevertheless, he did not speak to her, and he was as reasonably entertaining as most men appeared to Florence.

So she forgot her intention to pry into his secret soul, and lost herself in conjectures as to the motives of the ward and watch he seemed to hold over his wife.

Philip appeared quite satisfied, whether she conversed or remained silent, so she had ample time to settle all the pros and cons to her mind.

"He is jealous, of course he is, and reasonable enough too, considering he has married such a child. I shall give her a hint; those sorts of dark, sanguine-looking men are always jealous, and have furious tempers when roused. With his brows knit, and his eyes flashing, he looks really now as if he would no more mind committing a murder than I do eating this bread and butter. It will be my duty to warn the child. Heavens! she speaks to Frederick, and the man glares at him. Jupiter Ammon! what a countenance. I must go and release Frederick from his awful, and to him unknown situation."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I do not like those people now at the Court," said Philip to Lotty, on the morrow after this party.

"That is very likely, Philip," said Lotty, as she sat busily tying his fishing-flies.

"One is a vain, selfish, opinionated female, tied to as weak a fool as 'twas ever my lot to encounter; and the other ought to be called 'Gamp,' and I need say no more. Associating with such creatures would make a monkey gape."

Lotty laughed and said, "Yet each of them rejoice in a few virtues, that some of us may want. It is rare to find a person wholly devoid of amiable qualities."

"You are a philosopher, Lotty."

"I do not think I am so much of a philosopher as a person who can easily accommodate herself to the company she is in. My two school-fellows rather amuse me, they have turned out so exactly what I expected they would."

"As you are such a judge of character, let me hear your opinion of mine."

"It is not a favorable one, Philip."

"As how?" said Philip, his brows knitting.

"Because you would marry me, without caring for my affection."

"Lotty, Lotty, that is false! You know 'twas my ardent, infatuated love for you, that made me secure you at any price."

"You loved yourself, Philip, because, if you had loved me, you would not have taken advantage of my dying father's wishes (which you saw, were commands to me) to make me marry you, without having that love for you which I ought to have felt."

"You speak strangely, Lotty, to one who is your husband."

"I do it advisedly, Philip, because it is my firm purpose to fulfil my father's wishes, to love you if I can; and I think you must know my character sufficiently well, by this time, to be aware that, with or without, I shall perform my duty as your wife. Will you trust and believe in me, that all this I mean to do?"

"I cannot, at present, see the drift of what you mean, Lotty; you are my wife — as such I command your love and obedience."

"My obedience you have, Philip; my love has to be gained. Remember it was your own doing, marrying me without."

"Am I so very disagreeable, personally and mentally," said Philip, hotly, "that I am to sue to a child like you, for what no woman ever denied me before, did I take the trouble to demand it?"

"My love is worth the trouble of gaining it," said Lotty, looking up with an expression in her face, so lovely and yet so exalted, that Philip felt he could have knelt at her feet, and sued as the humblest slave for one word of love. As it was, he said, with faltering voice, "Love me, Lotty, for there is nothing on earth that I covet so much."

"I wish to do so, Philip, but you will not permit me. Can you not be generous, and allow something for the peculiar circumstances under which I was made to marry you, being myself of a nature neither pliable nor yielding? Can you not act a noble part of forbearance and patience, and win my love through gratitude for such conduct?"

"I have been doing so, child."

"Yes, and I was becoming contented and happy."

"In what way have I changed, then?"

"You have within your heart, Philip, some ill weed, that chokes every fine and noble feeling. Why need you seek revenge for what you know I regret as much as yourself? By resenting the want of my love, can you make it spring? Trust me, be frank and generous with me. I know not my own heart, if it remains insensible to high and noble actions, but it closes when ——" she paused.

"What, Lotty? you can have nothing less bitter to say to me than you have done: then what, I ask?"

"You know, Philip, better than I can explain, and it is to warn you that I have spoken, as you think, thus bitterly."

"I have not now to learn how to manage a woman," said Philip, fiercely, "especially ——" He was about to add, "one a child such as you are;" but a remembrance of her escape from him the day he first told her how he loved her; a look at her now, with the clear eyes looking into his with truth and determination dwelling there, told him he dealt with no child with no ordinary woman.

But his pride of manhood, his lofty sense of his own intellect and powers, his firm persuasion that no woman lived who could brave his will and yet not suffer for it, all, all bore down the love he felt for the first time in his life, and felt so strongly, making him think it were better to lose the heaven he panted for in the possession of her love, than gain it by any other means than as he willed it.

"Come, child, you have fooled enough," he said, kissing her forehead. "Get on your things, and come with me to the brook, and pray let me hear no more nonsense from my little Lotty's lips. The heroics would be bad enough to bear in a woman twice your age, much more my child wife."

Lotty obeyed, and as he watched her playful sports with her Bear, while the trout, unheeded by him, took the tempting fly, he said to himself, "Little, silly thing! as if I, a man of the world, with twice her experience, had to be taught how to woo. She shall love me, that I have sworn to myself. As she says herself, her love is worth some trouble, and having often railed at matrimonial mawkishness, I must not grumble if it does cost me some trouble to break her in. When I have conquered her, when I have brought her to my arms with penitence and beseeching love, then, and then only, shall she see that the earth contains not a thing I prize so much as her very shadow, wild, wicked, little thing! No conqueror of worlds ever triumphed as I shall; no gambler ever played for such a stake."

"Ah, Philip," said Lotty, "that must be a fine fellow; you have had him on the last ten minutes."

In some confusion Philip drew in a little trout, about the length of his finger, whose agonized attempts to escape from the fatal hook had been quite unheeded until that moment.

Luckily Lotty was summoned to the house by visitors.

It was Florence and her husband.

"Well! my dear, Frederick and I have come over to see your abode, and upon my word 'tis vastly pretty, quite a bijou of a place. This clematis puts me in mind of those beautiful wreaths that Forster and Duncan sent us for the ball, after Margaret's marriage. They are as pretty as if artificial, are they not, Fred? Well, my dear, and where is my lord? the servant said fishing, so I suppose we shall not be favored with a view of his highness."

"I cannot say, indeed," said Lotty; "but if you wish particularly to see him, we will walk down to the brook."

"O, no, my dear, we don't care, do we, Frederick? we just came over to see you—I am not quite happy about you, my dear, such a child as you are, married to that tall, dark morose man, handsome as he is. Yet, you know, 'handsome is as handsome does,' is it not, Fred? and we both think he is horridly jealous, and of a frightful temper. Don't we, Fred?"

"That is your opinion," began Mr. Bankes.

"And yours too," said Florence, decidedly.

"Why, yes, after what you told me last night, Flo., I am decidedly of your opinion," returned Mr. Bankes.

"There now, you see, Lotty, so I thought we could not do better than just come over and warn you."

"Thank you," said Lotty.

"You may well say that, my dear, for it is not every one whom I care to trouble my head about. Never was any one less given to meddle or make; but, in your case, I should be neglecting a positive duty, if I did not tell you my suspicions, and give you some advice. So now, Frederick, you stay here—Lotty has got something to show me up stairs; and when we have finished our confab, let us find you here."

"But the dog?" said Fred, looking dismally at Bear.

"O! do not fear him," said Lotty; "see! I will make him like you." And touching Mr. Bankes on the shoulder, she continued, "Look, Bear! friend, Lotty's friend; take care of him."

"My heavens! don't," exclaimed Florence; "if your husband caught you doing that to Frederick, he'd cut him up into mince-meat."

"O! don't, Mrs. Leigh," said the alarmed Mr. Bankes, withdrawing from Lotty's touch.

Lotty laughed, saying, "I am afraid the mischief is past mending; however, I will be chopped up for you."

A shadow withdrew from the window, unobserved by all but herself.

"Well! my dear, as I was saying this morning to Margaret," said Flory, on their way up stairs, "it is quite a delight to me to see you all once more. But how subdued she is! and before I'd run after a husband as she does after Sir Harold, I'd be corked up in a bottle. He does not seem to me to be able to do a thing without her. Margaret here, Margaret there, Margaret everywhere. A boots at a hotel is better off."

"Margaret likes it; besides, Sir Harold is at present undergoing a great deal of trouble and annoyance about his estates, and Margaret is glad to assist him, as he is not accustomed to it."

"Accustomed to it! no, I should think not. My heavens! what a row he made at breakfast this morning, about some unlucky fellow called Price. I must say Margaret calmed him down, and got it all satisfactorily settled. But to lead such a life; why, she can have no peace to herself, no time to read a nice gossipy novel, or try on a new dress, or have her hair done up in twenty different styles, to see which is most becoming. Ah! my dear, delighted as I was to see them, they are a very unhappy couple; and though I make a point of never meddling or making, I shall be only doing my duty to warn Margaret."

"Of what, Flo.?" said Lotty.

"Why I, — that is, — I shall tell her what I think."

"Perhaps she knows it already."

"But, my dear, bystanders are bystanders, and they see more than most people. Margaret wants a little advice, and I shall make a point of giving her some. Well! dear, your house is a picture of neatness and comfort, and I hope you will be able always to keep it so. Ah! here is your old nurse. How do you do, nurse? I think your mistress is lucky to get such a nice husband, and such a pretty house, before she was seventeen."

"I should have been glad to see her still Miss Beauvilliers for a few years yet, Mrs. Bankes," said the nurse; and laying her hand fondly on the pretty curls, she continued, "I don't like to see happy young girls taking upon themselves cares and troubles that befit older years. But my darling is like no one else — God love her!"

"She is as good a little body as ever lived, nurse; but now I must say good-by, for I have left my dear Frederick, who is all the fondest heart could wish, gentle, kind, and inexpressibly attentive and affectionate, quite alone in the drawing-room. My dear Lotty, how ill nurse looks; are you sure the servants are attentive and kind to her? I know what servants are; bring a new one in among them, and they become jealous as tigers, especially if they never had a mistress before. I should not wonder if they hated both you and nurse. And O! my dear, suppose they should poison you — I have heard of such things."

"So have I," said Lotty, highly amused at her visitor's impertinence and credulity.

"Then, my dear, take my advice; make the cook come in and taste every dish before your eyes ere you touch it."

"That will be rather troublesome: I think I will take my chance."

"But whom have we here, my dear? — a carriage driving to the door. Dear me! it is only Carry; such a figure too, and that frightful baby with her. I really do think that child will be an idiot, it's so odd in its ways. So, my dear, I shall go, for really one never can get in a word when Carry is in company, unless 'tis about teething and croup. Good-by! it delights me to see you so well and happy, with such a charming husband and house; just what you deserve, you dear, good soul!"

It was some minutes before Carry could notice Lotty's welcome, she was so busy unpacking the baby, and seeing it was not injured by the drive.

"Now, Jane," to her nurse who accompanied her, "throw this shawl round him, little darling! the room is cold, I think. Do you think we did right to take off his pelisse, Jane?"

"Well, he might miss it when we came to go again," said Jane.

"Perhaps he might! but, Lotty, would you mind shutting the window? I was determined to call upon you, Lotty, and as Margaret offered me the carriage to take baby a drive, I was glad of the opportunity of bringing him here for your old nurse to see; she must be such a judge of fine babies."

"I will ring for her," said Lotty.

"Poor little man!" said the old nurse, when she arrived, and took in her tender arms the little, weak, wabbling thing; "and what have they wrapped you up like this for, I wonder? Why, ma'am, you should have him out on this fine, sunny day, sprawling on the grass, with as little clothes on him as can well be."

"Good heavens! nurse, what a barbarous notion. It would kill my darling."

"He'd be a deal stronger and better-looking," said nurse, not perceiving Mrs. Royston's shocked maternal vanity. "Why, ma'am, look at all my Mr. Beauvilliers, six of them in a row, every one about six feet high, and stout in proportion — not a sickly, not a weakly one in the lot. They have been every day as wasn't to say wet, a sprawling on their little backs on the grass, from May to September, and nothing on 'em but a bit decency flannel."

"But not Miss Lotty!"

"Eh! but I have had Miss Lotty out from six in the morning to six at night, her little legs and arms blue with cold, and yet she'd cry to go in, and slap my face so pretty. O, she was sensible, was she! I had a mind to think often she was a fairy, she was that clever."

"But she is very little, nurse."

"So she be, ay, so she be; but past all belief, sensible."

"So is my boy; you cannot think what faces he makes if he has not sugar in his food. But look at his legs, nurse; Mr. Royston teases me so, and says he is sure to be bandy-legged."

"He has a great look on't," said nurse, more candidly than politely; "but Master Harold's the bonny boy. I never seed such another out of my lot."

Nurse having now completely finished herself in Mrs. Royston's eyes, as a nurse of discernment, was suffered to depart; and telling Jane to pack up the precious child again, Caroline, while assisting in this interesting business, talked to Lotty.

"It is a wonder to me how Margaret's boy does thrive; she has it down at stated times; but would you believe it, she never tastes its food — (O Jane, take care, he has got that purple ribbon in his mouth) — or sees his clothes aired — (I wonder if there can be anything poisonous in the dye of that ribbon), or comes up to the nursery at unexpected times; in fact, she never worries herself in the least about him. And he looks just the sort of child to go off in a fit, or have croup. (Now my darling's little beauty hat, with its pretty, titty, little feather.) And he has such plain clothes — brown Holland frocks, actually! and he to be a young baronet. (Now, then, Jane, walk him up and down before the window until the carriage comes round, where I can see him.) I could not answer to my conscience, Lotty, being such a mother; and I am sure I hope to goodness Flo. will never have any. Her mind is wholly taken up with finery and gossiping, and I feel ready to cry at what her baby will suffer."

"It is to be hoped she will not have one," said Lotty.

"Here is the carriage. I must not keep it waiting. Good-by, dear! delighted to see you so well and happy. Now, darling!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Her visitors being gone, and knowing that Philip was not likely to appear again soon, after what he had accidentally heard at the window, Lotty called her Bear, and went to sit under the great chestnut tree.

"Ah! Bear, dear Bear! come with me, and we will have a little flirtation."

To the innocent and unsuspecting world, Bear usually appeared as a dog of such stern gravity and profound wisdom, that many who beheld him were inspired with awe, and almost all with fear. But now, what a change under the influence of those magical words, and the bright smile that accompanied them! Bear became a great, unwieldy puppy, of most frolicsome mood. One moment he had a huge paw on each of Lotty's shoulders; then he was away, like the rushing breeze, impelled by the same viewless purpose as it were. Then, like a sinister, villanous dog, he would appear again from behind, and stealing with noiseless footfall, would pounce upon his little mistress like an overwhelming avalanche of Bear, sending her rolling on the sward.

"O! Bear, Bear, how wild you are to-day," said Lotty, quite breathless, at last, in her endeavors to escape his mad gambols. "Come, let us sit quiet now, and talk a while, like discreet people. Well, Bear, would you be Carry? No! you say. Then, would you be Flory? No, again. Then, Bear, would you be Lotty? Ah! Bear, think again. Lotty, at this age, with such a long life before her, and no bright, sunshiny hope. I have hope, do you say? I think you are right, Bear; and besides, I would not be Carry or Flo.; I would rather be Lotty. I think as you do, Bear. For we have a good purpose in hand, and we have our duty to do also. But it was sad, Bear, ah! very sad, that Lotty could make no impression! that poor Lotty still is not understood. But if we try to do our duty, if we steadily pursue our way, if we hope the best, pray for the best — ah! Bear, say we do not succeed, still that is better than being Carry or Flo., and life will pass quickly, looking for that aim, seeking that purpose. And then, Bear, if we succeed, if we open the blinded eyes, make the deaf ear to hear, enlarge the heart to understand—ah! that is angels' work; but we can help, and then, indeed, shall we be rewarded. The uncongenial tie will seem to have been a blessed bond, the long life of dead affections will blossom with roses. But, Bear, I doubt it. Did you say, 'Doubt not, Lotty?' Why, Bear? I tried to-day. My heart was proud and angry, but I did it, because it was my duty. Did you see me, laying my hand on my heart to keep it down? The All-Merciful helped me; the All-Powerful will assist me. I fold myself in the mantle of Faith and Hope. But I agree, my Bear, I agree; look not so wistfully; there are two people in the world with whom I would not change places."

"And to whom are you talking, Lotty?" said Philip, as he drew near, unexpectedly.

"To Bear," she said. "Bear knows all I say; and he knows as well as I do that we have been holding a very scandalous conversation, and abusing our neighbors."

"What do you mean, foolish child?" said Philip, half amused.

"Bear said he would not be Carry; and I said I would not be Flo.; and we were well content to remain as we are, rather than be either."

"I quite agree," said Philip. "I did not think you and Bear could muster up so much sense between you. Of all the insufferable females I ever saw — but pray what was she saying when I was coming in? I know it was something atrocious, you gave me such a warning look."

"She said you were jealous, and would make mince-meat of her spouse."

"Jealous of him, indeed! jealous of that atom of dust — that speck of nonentity! But you had your hand on his arm, Lotty."

"Yes, to show Bear he was a friend."

"Then, don't do so again; for, if you prevent Bear from eating him, I shall certainly kick him into the next parish."

"I wish to go this evening to see Millicent," said Lotty.

"Why on earth cannot you stay at home?"

"She is ill, Philip."

"I really do not wonder at it; that man, Herbert, having the constitution of a horse, thinks his wife ought to have the same. He will kill her some day, dragging her about to schools, parish meetings, and sick old women. And then when she is dead, he will, I suppose, canonize her, and think her a saint in heaven; will thank God for taking her to a better world."

"I think he is blinded at present by over-zeal; but I trust he will have no such shock to cool his ardor as the loss of his Milly," said Lotty.

"It would serve him right if he had."

"But may I go, Philip?"

"How long will you be away?"

"Two hours."

"If you will promise to be at home by four o'clock you may go. I have a respect for Mrs. Herbert, I must own; and really should grieve if we lost her."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"LITTLE LOTTY, how pleased I am to see your sweet face," said Milly, when Lotty arrived; "and Margaret will be here in a few minutes, too, and it will amuse me so much to hear you talk."

"Is your cough very bad, Milly?"

"Yes, at night; and the doctors say I shall not get rid of it until my baby is born. Here is Queen Margaret."

"Ah! how nice this is," said Queen Meg.

"Only you two. Do you know, I do not think I am ill-tempered; but Flo. and Carry are rather too much for me, all alone. I must beg, Lotty, that you and Philip will come and stay with us while they remain."

"You must write and ask Philip," said Lotty.

"What a good little wife! who would have thought, Milly, that our wild, little, saucy Lotty, would have made such a pattern wife!"

"But she is very learned on the matter; don't you remember the matrimonial harangue she gave us?"

"Yes; and how true her prophecy about Flory and Carry has proved. Well, we shall be all together next week, and may compare notes. Flo.," continued Margaret, "is very ill-natured about Augusta, and says very unkind things of her."

"I do not like Augusta," said Lotty; "she is mischievous, and I am sorry she is coming."

"She can do no harm to us, at all events, Lotty," said Margaret, in surprise.

"Yes, I think, if she wished it, she would make Gerald elope with her."

They both laughed at this speech, and asked Lotty if she was jealous, which made her pout, in school-girl fashion.

Gerald at this moment came in, and, addressing Margaret, said, "I wish, Lady Leigh, you would use your influence with Sir Harold not to employ the Joneses. Both father and son are notorious drunkards and Sabbath-breakers."

"Ah, Gerald! it rejoices me so much to see Harold employing any one, as well as working himself, that I could not, would not, say aught that might lead to another change."

"But think of the sin, think of the responsibility you draw upon yourself, in giving such men encouragement; why, you are answerable before God for giving them the means of committing such sins."

"By and by, Gerald, when Harold is more settled in his plans, then we may try; but not now, I entreat you."

"Pardon me; you are not justified in so doing. Are these men to go on sinning — to be encouraged therein, because you have not sufficient moral rectitude in you to urge Sir Harold to do what he ought?"

"In other words," said Lotty, "you think Margaret ought to let her husband take his chance of sinking into the idle, listless man he was, rather than that the Joneses should make beasts of themselves?"

"Exactly, Mrs. Leigh."

"I will not do it," said Margaret.

"Then I must," said Gerald; "it ought to be done, and it must."

"I thought," said Lotty, "that a minister of the Gospel left the stern principles of duty and obedience to be enforced by other professions than his own. While following the footsteps of his Blessed Master, he persuades men to enter the True Fold, with gentle words, holy pity, and calm forbearance."

"But this duty is so clear, so simple," said Gerald; "am I to pander to the weakness of a sensible man, such as I know Sir Harold to be, when he likes ——"

"Yes," interrupted Lotty, "if by this means you save him."

"Mrs. Leigh! I am shocked: pardon me, but your doctrine is painful! Suffer me, some day, to talk this matter over with you. At present, Milly, I must go to the school. Are you sufficiently well to accompany me?"

"No, that she is not," said Margaret.

"But remember how inconvenient it is," said Gerald.

"I know it is, love," said Milly; "but I am indeed quite unfit for the exertion."

"So, good-by, Gerald," said Lotty, "and as you go to the school, here is something for you to meditate about. I don't think high-church clergymen, as they are called, ought to marry, they make such very uncomfortable husbands. They look upon their wives as machines to administer to their bodily comforts, and as slaves to carry out their ultra views. They have no consideration for either their personal or mental objections to such things. The duty of making them happy, of being courteous, kind, and forbearing, seems forgotten. They are on such a high pinnacle of excellence, they cannot stoop to the minor virtues."

"You are severe, Mrs. Leigh; uncharitable," said Gerald, with mournful fervor.

"I have borrowed the words, Gerald, but I would have you weigh them. Did you not promise and vow to cherish Millicent, in sickness and health, until death parted you? Death speaks in that cough."

"Ah!" said Gerald, springing to Millicent's side.

"It is but too true, love, that I am far from well," said Millicent, gently to him; "but my death shall never rest at your door, Gerald. I am no weak wife, not to say what I think; neither are you so severe to your Milly, that I should fear to appeal to you. I overtaxed my strength in the winter, dearest, and suffer for it now; but leave me at present, and you shall hear the doctor's opinion, and all I have to say, this evening."

He was reluctant to leave her, but she was getting flushed and nervous, and he listened to Margaret's advice to let her rest now.

But he begged Lotty to follow him into another room. Taking both her hands in his, with eyes full of anguish, he looked into hers. "Is her life in danger?"

"I believe not, Gerald."

"How long has she been thus ailing?"

"I noticed how thin and pale she had become when I came to High Leigh."

"And I never saw it, never heeded it. Ah, Lotty, if I am to lose her — so long waited for — only just won, what good will my life be to me?"

"Pray to God, Gerald, and put faith in your prayers."

"Faith! Lotty?"

"Yes, faith; you weary yourself to death — you work night and day — you take no meal in peace — you give yourself no relaxation — you create a vexed spirit within you. And what do you gain by all this? Nothing. Pray to God, and suffer him to answer your prayers, without putting yourself in the place of God. Why beseech him to grant you a favor, and then try to do it yourself?"

"Lotty, Lotty, your doctrine is not tenable; but I go to think the matter over."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It wanted five minutes to four o'clock as Lotty rode up the avenue to High Leigh. Philip was sitting under the veranda.

"What made you ride across the fields, instead of coming by the road?" said he, gloomily.

"I was afraid of being late, Philip; the fields are two miles shorter."

"So you would rather break your neck than fail in your appointment."

"It looks like it," said Lotty.

Was there no sentiment in Philip's breast that prompted him to gather the little fair thing to his heart, and clasping her close, bid her break every promise to him sooner than risk that dearest, most precious life? So lovely as she looked, too, the thick curls in disorder, the excited eyes looking wonderful in size and brilliance, the rich peach-bloom on her cheek, and the red lips parted, as the quick breath came and went, all showing the haste with which she had ridden to fulfil her promise.

No, there was but one feeling besides the uncontrollable admiration with which he gazed upon her; and that was a mean, unworthy thought, a fruit from the upas-tree, that dwelt within that fine, handsome form.

He would have given his right hand that she had been five minutes behind the time rather than before. If she would but do one thing with which he could find fault; if but for one fleeting moment he had it in his power to upbraid; if he could see those fearless eyes droop but an instant before his; he would rejoice, as men do, when the life-wish of their heart is gratified.

"Margaret is close behind me," said Lotty; "that is, she is coming by the road, and will be here in five minutes."

"I thought you were so fond of Margaret that you spent every moment of your time in her company; why, then, did you not accompany her?"

"I should have been late, and that, Bear, is a thing you and I do not like to be when we have made a promise, is it not, old fellow?" And Lotty departed to put herself in walking trim, Margaret arriving before she returned.

There was something in Margaret that made it almost impossible for any one to refuse, did she make a request. This might arise, in the first place, from the fact, that she seldom had a favor to ask which was not to be more gratifying to the conferrer than to herself.

In the second place, there was such a low, sweet tone in her voice, that no one could answer until the soft sound ceased. Thus Margaret could plead all her arguments ere she was interrupted.

Thirdly, the simple earnestness of her manner made all her requests seem to be such, that it became not weak, mortal man to resist an angel's pleading. And then her beauty—the Leighs ever paid a sort of devotion to beauty; so that all these things combined, when Lotty joined them, she found Margaret had asked, Philip had consented, and they were to spend a week at Court Leigh.

"Horrid bore!" said Philip, as he returned from handing Margaret into her carriage. "Do you hear me?" he continued; "this is a horrid bore!"

"Going to Court Leigh, Philip?" answered Lotty.

"Yes," said Philip, "to be tormented by the silliest lot ot people I ever met."

"I suppose we need not go, unless you like it," said Lotty.

Philip was silent; he had made the remark in order to extort from Lotty whether Margaret and herself had not made the plan first, and also if Lotty was anxious to go. He could find out neither the one nor the other, so he was forced to speak out.

"Pray did you and Lady Leigh arrange this invitation before you consulted me?"

"Margaret told me she meant to ask us. I told her to write to you, and Millicent said she had better ask *viva voce*."

"I knew it was a concerted scheme. I felt sure I was to be dragged into an unexpected consent. I shall not go!"

"Very well," said Lotty.

"Of course, you wish to go?" said Philip.

"I am afraid Bear and I are not so amiable. We would rather visit Margaret alone, would we not, Bear, after that sad, naughty conversation we had?"

"I suppose we must go," said Philip, "as I promised."

"Just as you please, Philip."

He looked at her, putting his fishing-rod together with her little white fingers. He knew she spoke the truth, but nothing prompted him to say, "I am sorry, Lotty, that I fancied otherwise."

Gerald allowed no private thoughts to interfere with his duties at the school. As soon as that was over, with strong, vigorous strides he took his way, five miles off, to Dr. Murray. The good doctor, knowing the character of his visitor, made no secret of his fears regarding Mrs. Herbert's health.

"I should," said he, "be very uneasy, indeed, but for her present condition. Her child born, I then shall be able to judge how much her constitution is affected, and how much may be imputed to this cause."

"And in case of the former, Dr. Murray?" asked Gerald.

"Why, then, Mrs. Herbert must go, for a year or two, to a warmer climate."

"To save her life?" murmured Gerald, hoarsely.

"Nothing else can save it, my dear sir," answered the kind doctor; "she seems to me to have been born with a good constitution, but to have been badly nursed, or neglected."

"That is true," said Gerald, calling to remembrance the early hardships of Millicent's childhood.

"You may rely upon one thing, Mr. Herbert; deeply as I know you will feel anything I may have to say, you shall have the truth as nakedly placed before you as my science or skill shows it to me."

"Thanks! thanks!" was all that Gerald could mutter; and he strode away over the hills, to wrestle with the sorrow that seemed bending like a dark cloud over his head.

To save her life, he must leave his charge, his duties, his people. He needed a clearer head than was his at present to solve the question as to which he ought to do. Love and nature pleaded loudly, duty and conscience seemed sternly to rebuke them. As he turned his face homewards, beset with such feelings of irresolution as had never before assailed that firm, upright mind, he met Harold, returning on horseback from a tour of inspection. Gerald knew that the day was oppressively hot, which might, in some degree, account for the vexation and weariness apparent on Harold's countenance.

A warning voice seemed to tell him, "Pass on, and say nothing." But would that be acting the part of a conscientious, just, and righteous pastor of his people?

"My dear Sir Harold," said he, laying his hand upon the horse's rein, "suffer me to say a few words to you."

An expression passed over Harold's face, which told, as words tell, that it wanted but this drop of vexation to brim the already full cup.

"I am in a hurry," he said, with all the Leigh sulkiness grafted on the Leigh obstinacy.

"I will detain you but a moment," said Gerald, his late feelings lending unusual softness to his manner; "will you oblige me by not employing the Joneses?"

"They are the best workmen on the estate!" exclaimed Harold.

"But the worst men, Sir Harold; their characters are too notorious to be unknown to you; and the Browns, who have had very little work from Mr. Price, are the reverse — church-going, religious, quiet, sober people; they are at present almost starving for want of employment."

"And pray, Mr. Herbert, are you aware," said Harold, turning pale with anger, "that Price was obliged to discharge your highly-principled Browns, because, occupied, I suppose, with their prayers and Bibles, their work was totally useless? Everything they did had to be done over again."

"Do not scoff, Sir Harold; it may be true that the Joneses have the worldly advantage of knowing their trade better, but should that be the plea of a man gifted with every attribute of sense and discernment that the Great Father of us all can bestow? should that blind him to the one great, fearful fact, that, by employing such men, you give them the means of committing sin? You put into their hands the power of damning their immortal souls forever; you place others in the dangerous vortex of contamination. O, Sir Harold, be warned, be advised!"

"I'll warn myself of one thing, I'll be advised of one fact," said Harold, in a lordly, Leigh passion. "You have spoken your last word to me, you prating parson! You have looked your last look as a friend! Not employ any person I choose, ha! — Take your pick and choice, ha! — I am likely to do it! I feel disposed, truly, to lose the best workman I have, because he does not pray in a becoming fashion! and I am to take any fool that offers, provided he goes to church — ha!"

And he galloped away with an oath on his lips, and anger in his heart, while Gerald stopped to pray for him, with nothing but pity in his heart. And yet, Gerald, did you not remember your Master's precepts, who talked with publicans and sinners, who blessed the peacemakers, who fed the hungry, healed the sick, forgave the wretched?

Did he ask out of the five thousand who were fed with the five barley loaves and two fishes, who were holy, who were sinners?

Did he demand of the leper, the blind, the lame, "Why are ye such sinners? I heal but the holy and good."

Did he not forgive the wretched as they looked on him, the sinners as they touched the hem of his garment? Gerald, why deem it part of your sacred, holy calling to be judge? why pass sentence on the sinner, weak, wavering, or wicked, ere death has sealed up his last hope? Rather help him on his stumbling path, with cheering, persuasive words; with examples, not commands; with deeds, not judgments; with hope and energy, not despair and doom. Help the weak sinner on his weary way, raise not up before him the steep mountain of perfection, but let the hill of duty and difficulty slope gently to his sight, until strengthened by exercise, invigorated by hope, he looks behind at what he has surmounted, and gathering joy and assurance from the sight, he views the higher hill and steeper path, that rise, but as brighter goals to win, fairer scenes to view, until at last heaven rewards his sight.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

EITHER alarmed at the account of Millicent, or wishful to see her before he started on his yacht excursion with his half-brothers, Basil arrived about this time, accompanied by the boys.

They formed a very fine addition to the party at Court Leigh, spending most of their time there, to relieve Milly of too much of their company. Basil was all life and spirits, the boys wild with joy, and so full of Lotty and her dog, that neither she nor Bear had time to pass severer judgments on Flo. and Carry. Harold alone was in a vile humor; not even Basil could smooth him down; and Philip was nearly as bad.

It had formed no part of his plans for the week they were to spend at Court Leigh, that Lotty was to be happy. But she was most provokingly so, renewing her acquaintance with the young Erles, and consorting with Basil, until her husband was driven half mad with jealousy and vexation.

As for Brian and Hugh Erle, in true boy-fashion, they made no secret of their admiration for Mrs. Leigh.

"Lucky for you I am only fifteen," said Hugh to Philip, "or I would fight you."

"No, you should not have her," said Brian; "I would fight the world for her."

Most men would have felt rather flattered as well as amused at their boyish enthusiasm; but the words sunk like poisonous weeds into Philip's jealous heart.

Augusta surprised everybody by her pale looks and subdued manner; perhaps some might have noticed the burning blush that rushed over her face as Philip bowed to her with overstrained, and, as it were, mock courtesy, on their first greeting; but in a day or so she recovered, and was quite herself.

"Well, my dear," said Flo., "here we are met again once more; really it is quite delightful, especially as I have been longing to show you my darling Fred; to my eyes he stands foremost as the flower of the flock."

"In what way?" said Augusta, coldly.

"Why, of all the six husbands of us six school-girls—O! by the by, my dear, I beg pardon—I quite forgot you do not possess one yet. However, never mind, I dare say your turn will come shortly. I know a cousin of Fred's, to whom I dare say I could introduce you; very, very like him, dear fellow! only not nearly so handsome, and shorter, with rather red hair, but very amiable. He would do anything I tell him, he is so sensible; so we will have you two together, and see if we cannot manage it. But, as I was saying, not one of all the husbands equals my dearest Frederick in my eyes."

"I should hope not, Flo.," said Lotty.

"Ah! there you are, you little sarcastic Bear; but I know well enough what you mean, poor little dear! However, we will say nothing; it is not every one who is so fortunate as I am."

"Dear little darling!" interrupted a voice, by her side; "is it waking, little pet! and would it stretch its itty pretty arms?"

"Bless me, what a fool you make of yourself, Carry!" said Flo., "as if there never had been a baby before; besides, you really must allow me to give you a little advice. It is very inconvenient, not to say disagreeable, always to have a baby in the drawing-room."

"You must do without my company, then, if you dislike that of my darling child."

"We will try and bear the loss, all the more from knowing that you will not miss us."

"It is a mother's duty to attend to her child, precious, helpless thing!"

"Then where is the use of your having a nurse, I should like to know? My dear, I never like to interfere in other people's matters, but I think it my duty to tell you, as my oldest school friend, that you and your baby are perfect plagues."

"Thank you!" said Carry, with bitter civility; and, catching up her child's paraphernalia, she also swept herself and it out of the room.

"There! I thought I should banish her; now we will have a little rational conversation. I make a point of always speaking the truth to Carry, and I mean further to tell her that she ought to take a lesson from Margaret. By the by, where is Margaret? running after Sir Harold, I'll be bound; now mark my words, she will sicken him of her company. Though my dearest Frederick says he would never leave my side night or day, I won't permit it; I say, 'No, Frederick, I know the upshot of it all;' and besides, what is more tiresome than having a man dangling after you all day? no time for nice little chats about fashions, dresses, and one's lovers."

"I suppose you have done with the latter now," said Lotty.

"Ah! ah! sly little puss!" said Flo.; "but at all events, if I have done, or ought to have done, Augusta has not; now, my dear, do tell us, give us a history of all your lovers."

Flo. had a very unladylike habit of winking with one eye; and, as she made this remark, she winked at Lotty with unmistakable meaning. She meant to make Augusta rehearse all her fibs about Philip and others, by which she and Lotty would have some fun.

"Anything the matter with your eye?" said Lotty, in answer to the wink, and thinking it quite fair she should also have her amusement.

"My eye? no, child; what an innocent you are!"

"If she is," said Augusta, loftily, "I am not; and did I think it needful to punish vulgar impertinence, Mrs. Bankes should know my opinion of her."

"Which, luckily, is of no consequence to Mrs. Bankes," said that lady, with high gusto at having provoked Augusta. "Nonsense, my dear! don't get up on your stilts; for though we know little Lotty cut you out, you have had a narrow escape. I am sure when I look at that man, really, my dear Lotty, I quite shudder!"

"Why do you look at him then?" said Lotty.

"What a little imperturbable thing it is," said Flo., looking a little disconcerted.

"I think," said Augusta, "it is no mark of good breeding, Mrs. Bankes, to speak thus of a man before his wife."

"But Lotty knows my way, and that I must ever speak as I think. Not but what he is wonderfully handsome, and what you call very *distingué*-looking; and upon the whole, I don't wonder, Augusta, that you have fretted so about him, for you would have made a very striking couple—he is so dark, and you so fair; in fact, you would have suited him, in point of appearance and contrast, much better than Lotty."

"I am sorry I cannot make him over to you now, Augusta," said Lotty; "I am afraid the law would interfere."

"Spare your pity, child; no one envies you," replied Augusta, looking at Lotty with anything but loving eyes.

"No, that they don't. Heavens! how he scowls at those fine boys! By the by, how handsome Lord Erlscourt is! now there is a man for you! except my own Frederick, I never saw one whom I could sooner trust with my affections."

Lotty laughed merrily, partly at the idea of comparing the little, insignificant Bankes with Basil, partly at Flo.'s thinking she had any affections.

"Why do you laugh, child?" said Flo., who, though perfectly well satisfied with herself in every respect, yet was keenly alive to ridicule.

"Do you really wish to know?"

"Yes, of course, I desire it."

"Then, because Basil would make two Mr. Bankes, and your affections are always placed on your last new dress."

"What a little pert thing! however, my dear, you are so far right, I love a new dress. I think it is my duty, for Frederick's sake, to dress well. So you call him 'Basil;' very familiar, upon my word; and pray what does my Lord say to that?"

"He has never said anything as yet."

"Then take my advice, my dear, and don't do it again, or we shall be having mischief. I am a very good judge in such matters; I shall never forget Frederick and those clerks at his father's bank. Really he looked as if he could eat them all."

"Rather an indigestible meal," said Lotty.

"Funny little thing you are, to be sure, Lotty! I don't so much wonder now that the Grand Turk fancied you instead of Augusta, you are so amusing; though, certainly, to my taste, you, Augusta, are far the handsomer, and you have such a figure too! really you can carry off any style of dress, and any number of flounces — and do you know, my dear, they are getting to nine in number. Unlucky for you, Lotty, as I don't see how you could wear more than three."

"That is why I try to exist without any," said Lotty.

"You certainly do, and always did, dress in a peculiar style, that no one else could bear, I fancy; but it quite becomes you, my dear; and little and childish as you are, Lotty, you have a pretty face. But I must go and see after Margaret. A fine thing, indeed! dragging us down all the way from London, and then shutting herself up all day with Sir Harold."

Flo. seemed to have been as successful in probing Sir Harold and Lady Leigh's weak points, as she had been in finding out Augusta's and Carry's; for Harold was seen passing the windows in a fiery mood, while Margaret joined them with her fair face unusually flushed.

CHAPTER XL.

HAROLD had cause to be vexed: his Margaret had not sympathized with him as he expected on Gerald's account; besides, he had had a short and concise letter from his bankers:

"Messrs. Moneypenny's compliments to Sir Harold Leigh, Bart., and beg to draw his attention to his cash account, &c., &c."

For a few moments he gazed on the items mentioned in the letter in blank dismay. Then the first pang of ruin and poverty rushed through Harold's heart; while the large quantity of repairs in hand, which, if pursued, would swell those horrible items into twice the amount, appalled him.

He rang furiously for Mr. Price, who arrived in due time.

"Look there!" said Sir Harold.

"I am not surprised," said Price, blandly, and rubbing his hands in a provokingly easy manner.

"What the devil do you mean, Price?"

"Of course, Sir Harold, I expected no less. I am only surprised it is not more."

"If you do not wish to drive me mad, speak out, man, and tell me what is the meaning of that letter."

"You have overdrawn your account, Sir Harold."

Mr. Price, the account, and the bankers, were all sent, one after another, to a very hot place by Sir Harold; and finding that his master was in no mood to be trifled with, Mr. Price at last condescended to speak out.

"You know, Sir Harold, I warned you not to take so much upon you at once; I kept advising you to do a little at a time; but my Lady, you see, Sir Harold, my Lady would go among the people, and she got your ear, Sir Harold, when I was not permitted to speak, old and valued servant as I have been to the family ——" Here Mr. Price made a demonstration of emotion.

"Hang your foolery, man! come at once to the point, and let me know how I am to get out of this mess."

"Perhaps," said Price, maliciously (for he was a rogue now, though he might not have been one when he first became agent of the Leigh estates), "perhaps, Sir Harold, you would like to consult with my Lord Erlscourt; his opinion has ever ——"

Harold interrupted him with another violent exclamation, proving to Mr. Price that his shot had told.

For after all he had boasted, and still was boasting to Basil, how was he to tell him the real state of the case? — more especially as Basil had told him the same thing as Mr. Price, namely, not to do too much at a time.

"We may certainly fell a little more timber, and there is the half year's rent coming, in six weeks," continued Price.

"Three thousand five hundred pounds! What a drop that is to liquidate such a debt, man, and we to live too!" said Harold.

"If you, Sir Harold, could persuade my Lady to reduce the establishment a little."

Mr. Price hated "my Lady," and he knew Harold could not bear her name mentioned by him; so he was prepared for another burst of wrath, and then a dismissal to think over the matter. This all took place after breakfast; and Margaret, knowing the lines of Harold's face as the lover of Nature traces the coming storm, was appalled as she entered his study to ask if he required her for any business. He sullenly folded up the letter; men do not like women to see that they have been foolish or unwise.

"That idiot Price says we are doing too many repairs, and shall shortly want money."

"Have you not the fifteen thousand pounds my father left, Harold?"

"More than half is gone; a part I spent in the first payment for our yacht, Margaret."

"O, sell it again, dear Harold!" said Margaret, quickly.

"Sell the yacht! give up the thing I have been so full of all the winter, Margaret! I little thought you would be so unkind, unjust."

"Not unjust, Harold; our people ——"

"I hate the people! Why should I spend my money on a lot of ungrateful rascals? I will leave them all. I will shut up Court Leigh, and we will go to the Mediterranean, Margaret, make a home of the yacht, and living in those lovely, luxurious climes, we shall be free from all trouble and care."

"But our duty, Harold?"

Harold sent duty off after Mr. Price, the cash account, and the bankers, making Margaret's cheek pale with the first scene of violent temper that he had displayed before her. In the heat of his anger, he accused her of selfishness, cant, hypocrisy, want of love, coalition with Gerald, and was winding up with a strong bias to send her after Duty, when the door opened and the amiable face of Mrs. Bankes made its appearance.

"Hoity-toity! here's a scene!" said she, highly pleased at having arrived at this crisis; "who would have thought, Sir Harold, that you shut Margaret up here, merely to favor her with a matrimonial exhibition of passion? I am glad to see Margaret has enough spirit in her to oppose you, as I suppose you don't get into rages for nothing. I always thought her such a meek-spirited wife."

"Whatever you thought, Mrs. Bankes," said Harold, recovering himself on the instant, all his usual high-bred courtesy in his voice and manner, "Lady Leigh has the advantage this time of being in the right, and I have to apologize to you, my dear wife, for an exhibition of temper, which I trust is my first and last before you." He kissed her hand as he spoke, and left the room.

"Upon my word, very pretty! and so this is the first time he ever got into a rage with you. Well, take care; the leap once taken, be very careful, and not irritate him again. I am a very good judge of character, and these Leighs have very odd tempers. Put them out, my dear, and they are mad, raving. How thankful I am my dearest Frederick has such a sweet, feminine disposition! Upon my word, I feel for you and Lotty, indeed I do."

This was said at the drawing-room door, so that Lotty heard it, and said,—

"Why are Margaret and I such objects of pity?"

"Ah! my dear," said Flo., winking violently at Margaret, "little pitchers have long ears."

"I consider Mr. Bankes the object of most pity in the world," said Augusta, with emphasis.

"To be sure, my dear," said the imperturbable Flo., in her most irritating manner; "I understand, because he is not blessed with your lovely hand. Great pity, indeed, that he should merely choose a sweet, amiable, lively, agreeable wife, instead of such a charmer as you, my dear."

"So that is your estimate of yourself, is it, Flo.?" said Lotty, hastily, to prevent an explosion of wrath from the angry Augusta.

"And a very just one, too. I hold that person to be a fool who has not a tolerable good opinion of himself."

"Especially when they think of nothing else than themselves, they ought to be perfect in the study," said Augusta.

"Very true, my dear; besides, if one has not a good opinion of one's self, who else will, I should like to know?"

"'Who else,' Flo.? what grammar!" said Lotty, trying to turn the conversation.

"Grammar or not, Lotty, it is language pretty well understood by those who would rather not understand it. You and I never indulged in any flirtations by which our consciences would be harmed; we never said we had offers when we had not; we never told ——"

"Florence, we are not at school," interrupted Margaret, her lovely face assuming such a reproving and severe look, that even Florence was startled; "such bickerings were disgraceful then, how much more so now."

She left the room, and Augusta followed her.

"Well, to be sure! my Lady Leigh is taking enough upon her; she forgets I am a married woman too. I have a good mind to tell Fred. of her conduct: as if I were a school-girl still. I think I will. He will flare up, I know, and tell Sir Harold his mind about his wife."

"Then they will have a duel, Flo., and Sir Harold will shoot Mr. Bankes," said Lotty.

Flo. was for a moment abashed, but presently resumed with renewed vigor, —

"Not at all, my dear; my dearest Fred. may shoot him, and serve him right, too, thinking of such bloody-minded revenge. And your husband might be his second if he chose, and I'd have Lord Erlscourt for Fred.'s ——"

"And Brian and Hugh to hold the pistols, while you and I look on to see fair play."

"Come, Lotty, I won't have you treat as a jest what is a very serious matter."

"O! I thought you were in jest. I never imagined a woman, possessed of a dearest Fred., could coolly sit down and arrange a duel for him, just because Margaret desired to have Augusta's feelings spared."

"To be sure, my dear, who could, indeed?" said Flo., rapidly turning round under the fear of being laughed at; "Augusta always makes such mountains out of nothing. No wonder one does not know which is the head and which is the tail of what she is doing. But, poor thing! we ought to pity her — she is quite soured. I am sure, if I am thankful for anything, it is that I have a good temper. Nothing puts me out. I declare, here is Lady Katherine marching up the avenue, like an old swan, with Miss Leigh two steps behind her. What a regular old maid she is! getting red at the nose, too. Would not it be fun to get her into a flirtation? Poor old thing! I dare say she does not know what the word means. I think I will give her a little advice on the matter. I am fond of helping on affairs like that; and though I never make or meddle, a little word often excites a flame."

CHAPTER XLI.

Margaret knew, in spite of Harold's control over himself, that, as long as the matter remained on his mind, he would talk of it. She was fully persuaded he would keep his promise, and suffer no harsh words to reach her ear, as if for herself, but that he must disburden his vexation by talking it away: she prepared herself; and it needed preparation, for the scenes that she had to go through. To combat the resolution to leave home, people, and everything, that he might lead a quiet, listless, yet delicious life, in fairer, warmer climes, she knew required every exertion on her part, would call forth every power of love and persuasion. And she was to do this; she who felt that, with Harold, a cottage, a palace, the frozen seas, the torrid zone, were alike home to her.

And yet his immortal welfare, his eternal happiness, required him to remember that he lived not for himself alone. He must dwell where God had placed him, to perform his allotted task of life.

For those she loved, Margaret was unequalled in her devotion and firmness. Again and again Harold argued the point; again and again Margaret resisted his appeal. It is true, he gave her no harsh words; it is true, he indulged in no outward passion; but it burned within all the more freely, that it was smothered outwardly, until one evening Margaret suggested that they should consult Basil. From that moment Harold shut his thoughts up in sullen silence.

Mrs. Bankes had been favoring him with a few of her ideas upon Lord Erlscourt's evident pleasure in Lady Leigh's society, which, in comparison to what he felt in hers, certainly could bear no investigation. A few embellished facts of their former friendship, a few imaginary notions which she felt it her duty to tell Sir Harold, made him, in his present mood, forget his wife's devoted love, Basil's noble confidence.

Mrs. Bankes had also, with the zeal and energy of character on which she prided herself, made Mr. Royston see that his wife was a greater fool than he had first imagined her; and being perfectly satisfied with the happy result produced in both these cases, she looked round to see whose condition she could further improve.

Fortunately for Lotty, she was rather afraid of Philip, and determined, in her own mind, to leave his welfare to the last; so she took Lotty under her kind protection, associating her with the perpetual stings that she was inflicting on Augusta throughout all her other operations. It became hard to say which Augusta hated most. That she nourished in her heart feelings of bitter hatred and envy towards Lotty, has been seen; and though her better judgment might have shown her that Lotty had nothing to do with Flo.'s vulgar impertinence, still she hated on.

Born in a family whose principal characteristics consisted of beauty and badness, and who consequently had neither any love for each other, nor any respectability to keep up, it was but too true that Augusta deserved a great deal of the censure with which Mrs. Bankes overwhelmed her; but reproved in this coarse manner, brought to shame by a woman whom she despised for her vulgarity, yet feared for her insufferable assurance, every bad passion in Augusta's heart was roused. She had come down with the firm determination to mar Lotty's matrimonial happiness, no matter how she came out of the encounter herself, so that her purpose was fulfilled. But it required very little observation to see that Philip, morose as he was to her, loved his little child-wife with idolatry; while she, Lotty, the being she wished to hurt, injure, overwhelm with grief and despair, would probably mourn for him as the pitying angels mourn over sinners, but at the same time would rejoice in any act that restored her once more to her beloved Beauvillians.

Thus Augusta felt she was powerless; and her heart grew sick and sad within her, when she compared herself to her five school-fellows. Not that she cared for, or envied, Florence and Caroline; thank Heaven! though they were married, she did not envy them. But, from her childhood, this one idea had been placed prominently before her — she was to marry, and that as early as possible.

Her father, without having any great liking for domestic life, had yet been severely tried in his endeavors to do his duty in that line; for, after some years of most uncomfortable eccentricity, his wife had become permanently insane, leaving to his care and management three wild boys and one pretty girl. As she grew up, Augusta discovered that she was only held in esteem by her immediate relatives and guardians, according to her promise of beauty. And she had not the pleasure of thinking they were proud of and delighted in her appearance, because she was their daughter and sister, but because a female relative was a very tiresome burden, and they wanted to ease their shoulders of the care as soon as possible.

Thus, without love to soften her, without principles to guide her, no wonder she looked to marriage as the only possible relief to an unpleasant and somewhat forlorn situation.

But being deficient in feminine tact, and gentle wiles, she had been too open in her endeavors, too barefaced to escape censure, besides failing in her object.

She would have hated Margaret, had it been possible, for beguiling Sir Harold, and so exposing her to the taunts and upbraidings of her family.

She did hate Lotty, because she felt, had she gained Philip Leigh, she would have loved him, and for his sake have become all that a woman should be.

She felt that she had compromised her character most seriously, and, her father being dead, she had but her wild and dissipated brothers to fall back upon, whose companionship was much eschewed by well-disposed folk. Thus her situation was truly deplorable, and it required no stings from Mrs. Bankes's flippant tongue to make it worse. Had she but made a confidant of Margaret or Millicent, had she crushed her proud and irritated spirit, there might have been some hope. But at present she was becoming reckless; and knowing that when she left Court Leigh, she would have but a rough and unkind reception from the only home open to her, she was determined in some way to set a seal upon her fate.

Yet how?

It was useless remaining much longer in Cheshire. Court Leigh was unlike the Court Leigh of the former visit. A gloom hung over everything, casting its foreboding shadow on a doomed house.

Lord Erlscourt was unmarried, it is true, but experience told her "'twere vain to try" to attract him. His brothers were such complete boys; and besides, the elegant Miss Clare was not at all to their taste: they were just at the age to despise flounces, feathers, and dress, which Miss Clare delighted in. Yet where to go? Her thoughts rushed for a second towards "dear Fred.'s red-haired cousin," — but no, that was too humiliating; and the sound of Flo.'s active tongue, making itself heard through the long avenue, above the rustling of the leaves, and the twittering of the birds, gave her such a shock, that to go off to Australia with a gold-digger seemed preferable. She drew near to the speakers to escape her thoughts.

"My dear Lord Erlscourt," was Mrs. Bankes saying, "how you do spoil those boys! Now take my advice, or you will one day repent it — they will turn upon you."

Basil was lying on the grass, his half-brothers hanging about him, and teasing him every minute with questions; in fact, they wanted to rouse Basil from his book, that he might come with them on some favorite excursion.

Basil looked lovingly at his boys.

"There is always ill blood between half-brothers," pursued Mrs. Bankes. "I should not be doing my duty if I did not warn you, my Lord. Remember you are not married, and have no heirs. It will be a fine thing for one of them to become Lord Erlscourt."

"He will make a very fine Lord Erlscourt, madam," said Basil, as he laid his hand on Brian's dark curls.

"I! Lord Erlscourt?" said Brian; "never, Basil; when you die, I shall die."

"So shall I," said Hugh; "we could not live without you, brother."

"Ah! young gentleman, that's all very fine. Just wait till your brother has a family."

"He has," said Brian; "we all live with him."

"I mean married, my dear, with children of his own."

"I am not 'your dear,' ma'am," retorted Brian, angrily; "and I wish Basil was married, and I wish he had married Mrs. Leigh."

"And may I ask, young man," said Philip, haughtily, "why you should have fixed on my wife for such an honor?"

"Because I love her, and so does Hugh; and we think, yes, we both think ——"

"And Basil thinks," interrupted Lord Erlscourt, "that you are a couple of foolish boys."

"I insist upon hearing what he was going to say!" exclaimed Philip, hotly.

"O!" said Brian, nothing loth, "we think she is a great deal too good for you. If we had Mrs. Leigh to live with us, she should be treated as a queen, which she deserves."

Philip stretched out his hand to seize the boy, livid with rage. The active fellows were up and away, with Philip after them; they enjoying the fun, he in a towering passion.

"Well," said Mrs. Bankes, making the most of the opportunity of having Lord Erlscourt all to herself, "your boys have served him right, great brute! always snubbing that poor little thing, who runs her legs off to please him."

"She does not look unhappy, Mrs. Bankes."

"No, she dare not, or I am sure he would beat her. Really, it is shocking to think how Margaret and Lotty have thrown themselves away on those mad Leighs!"

"Mad!" said Basil.

"Yes, mad," said Mrs. Bankes; "cannot you see it in their eyes?"

"But there is no madness in the family, madam."

"Why, no, I suppose not," said Mrs. Bankes, reluctantly; "but then how can you account for Sir Harold's jealousy of you?"

"Of me, Mrs. Bankes?"

"Yes, of you; any mole can see it."

Mrs. Bankes was rather alarmed at Lord Erlscourt's raising himself from the ground at one spring, and preparing to depart.

"Where are you going?" she said.

"To Sir Harold ——"

"O, mercy me, don't! You will have a quarrel! There will be a duel! They will trace it to me! There will be such a scene! — and Frederick — O, my dear Frederick! — he will be drawn in. O, for mercy's sake, my Lord! — for goodness gracious sake, don't!"

"Then, madam, will you be kind enough to tell me if you really think what you said, that Sir Harold Leigh is jealous of me, Lord Erlscourt?"

"I never heard him say — I don't quite know; but Frederick and I were saying —— "

"Madam, if you cannot say yes or no, I shall depart to seek Sir Harold."

"O, 'yes,' then I'll say, or 'no,' or whatever you wish," said the alarmed Mrs. Bankes.

"That will not suit me. You must state on what grounds your information is founded."

"Well, Frederick and I —— "

"Do you mean, madam, that Mr. Bankes and you think so?'

"We had just a few suspicions."

"And have you heard that any other person has?"

"No, never; no, not a word! It was only Frederick and I talking."

"Then, madam, allow me to say, that if I hear such a thing again, or a word whispered, or any thing of a similar kind, in this house, said by you or Mr. Bankes, I shall —— "

"He'll duck Mr. Bankes in the horsepond," interrupted Brian, who, with Hugh, had returned unperceived from their race with Philip.

"Yes, and then horsewhip him with his best hunting whip," continued Hugh.

"And if you or he tease Basil any more, we'll shoot him!" concluded they, in a breath.

"Hush, boys!" said Basil; "you must never threaten a lady."

And with a low bow to the discomfited Mrs. Bankes, he departed, bearing both the boys with him.

"Well! if I did not give him a fine fright," said Mrs. Bankes to herself, recovering her spirits as soon as they departed out of sight. "Ah! here is that good little thing, Lotty. Here's my Lord gone off at a tangent, and Mr. Leigh has had to rush after those two rude boys, to give them a good flogging, which I am sure they deserve; more's the pity they did not get it — and all about you, too."

"I dare say you had a helping hand in the mischief, Flo."

"Ah! that is always what you used to say at school, Lotty; but you never were more mistaken in any one's character in your life. I am just the reverse of that — quiet and peaceable; I never make nor meddle."

"I will hear the rest of your character when I return," said Lotty; "but, at present, tell me which way did Philip go."

"So you would go after him, would you? Take my advice now, and keep out of the way. He was like a demon, my dear; his teeth set, his eyes on fire, his face like a sheet, always a sign of intense passion. — O! she is gone, and the right way, too. Well, if she will go, she will, and must take the consequences. I meant to have shown her quite the contrary direction, if she had persisted in asking me; but, however, I have done my duty, and who can do more? She is a very odd little thing, that Lotty. I am not sure that she is all right, there is such a childish way with her. Yet, with those eyes of hers, how she looks one through, as if she could read everything one was thinking of. However, she is welcome to read my thoughts. Thank goodness! I never say anything that I don't feel, and that is a comfort everybody cannot boast of."

This wind-up might have been meant for Augusta's ear, who came walking slowly by. If it was, it fell unheeded; she passed the amiable Mrs. Bankes with the air and look of a person who did not seem to know there was such a being in the world, while the latter joined Carry, and the three continued to walk up and down the avenue, Augusta passing but not joining them as they conversed.

"Well, Carry, they are queer people here, are they not? all at sixes and sevens."

"Yes," continued Carry; "it is very sad to see them all so occupied with their own concerns: they never look at the baby."

"No, to be sure; they have eyes for nothing but themselves and their husbands. And such husbands, too, — perfect brutes! But I always thought Margaret held her head a great deal too high; and Millicent, with all her goodness, has got a nice uncomfortable lot before her. I would not change my dear Fred. for one of them."

"Nor I my sweet baby."

"Well, you might pay Mr. Royston the compliment of thinking of him, Carry, for he lets you have all your own way."

"Of course, I would not change him for any of them; and, as you say, Flo., they seem all a very unhappy lot, and I suppose it's all their own doing."

"Of course," returned Flo. "If they had acted like you and me, Carry, their fates would have been very different; and that poor little Lotty is worse than all. I declare, when I look at that dark, morose-looking husband of hers, I fully expect to hear some day that he has cut her throat and shot himself."

"Philip Leigh will never hurt himself for any woman," said Augusta, haughtily, as she caught the last words, walking by them.

"I must say, I think he behaved shamefully to you," said Flo.

"It is out of the power of any man to trouble me," retorted Augusta.

"And that's the right way to treat them. As I often tell Fred, 'Ah! you don't know the annoyance, and trouble, and bother you men are. Far better is it for a poor woman just to have no one to care for her but herself.' As Carry and I were just saying, look at those three unhappy creatures, Margaret, Millicent, and Lotty, one worse off than another. I am sure I am thankful I am what I am."

"And so am I," said Carry. "I would not be either of them for the world."

"I am happy in thinking," returned Augusta, "that I envy no one; and I can look on you all with great feelings of compassion, not to say thankfulness, for my own lot."

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Flo., as soon as Augusta had walked off, "I smell sour grapes; and no wonder, poor soul! She will come to grief some day, I'll be bound. There's the dressing-bell; run, Carry, or we shall never be in time, and certainly I do like plenty of time to make myself tidy, just to please Fred.; and you'll want to kiss your baby."

CHAPTER XLII.

As Lotty passed on her way in search of Philip, she overtook Basil close by a stile. As she lightly sprang over it, he held the hand which he had taken in his to assist her, and staying her onward step, he looked into her face with his loving, brotherly eyes, just as he was wont to do when he lifted up the pretty face to kiss.

"Little Lotty, a shadow in your eyes."

"But not in yours, Basil; at what were you laughing so heartily to yourself?"

"At the unfortunate Mrs. Bankes, Lotty; she is busying herself so much about all our concerns, that a little more and she would make mischief. Thinking it was best to alarm her in a style she could understand, I was proceeding to give her a quiet, though strong, hint as to the danger of so doing, when the boys interrupted us in a rampant manner, and before I could stop them, threatened the unfortunate Mr. Bankes with a horsepond, a thrashing, and a duel."

"I should think, poor man! he will be off to-morrow."

"Not a bad thing either, Lotty, though my character will suffer through the boys; for by the time Mrs. Bankes reaches London, she will have persuaded herself that I had not only threatened, but actually executed my threats, even though her beloved Frederick is unharmed by her side."

"She must have annoyed you very much, Basil, before you would even give her a strong hint, as you call it."

"She could not annoy me, Lotty; but she may do infinite mischief to those I love, and therefore I was not so vexed as I might have been at my boys' rudeness; it may have the effect of stopping her. But, Lotty, why is this shadow in your once clear eyes?"

"The shadow will not remain long, I hope, Basil."

"Why did you marry in such haste, Lotty?"

"Anybody will tell you the reason, if you wish to know, Basil."

"Did you not see the sin of marrying without love, little one?"

"I think it was a sin," she said, calmly.

He looked into her truthful eyes.

"I forgot I must not longer treat little Lotty as my pet and child; so you must forgive me if I have said aught you do not like."

"You would not say to me, Basil, what I should not hear; go on, if there is anything you wish to know."

"If you want a brother, may I be the trusted one? not, Lotty, because you have not loving brothers in abundance, but they love you too well, you understand. I should be alone, but the Beauvillians you must consult *en masse*."

"I shall want no help, thank you, Basil, all the same. I have but to do my duty."

He looked at the childish face, the girl's slight form, and might have wondered at her answer; but as he met the steadfast gaze of her eyes, and noted the decision and fortitude that played round her mouth, he raised her hand to his lips and kissed it with reverence.

"I believe it; may you have your reward."

Lotty pursued her way, talking to Bear as she went.

"Come, Bear, find Philip. We must be very kind to him. He has been put out by our friend Flo., and we know how aggravating she can be. Even Basil was disturbed, Bear, so Flo. must have been very naughty. Ah! Bear, some of these days we shall all be happy and at rest; but this is a sad time, and worse is coming. We must wait in patience and hope, Bear, preparing for sad things, but doing our duty in everything, steadily, and in a good spirit. We are not Carry and Flo., we are Lotty and Bear, willing to do all we can. So you know where he is, Bear, do you? — up the dingle? Then let us make haste; it is late. Flo. has been telling Basil tales, which is very naughty. But you are right, Bear; there he is, lying on the grass."

Lotty approached Philip, and sat down near him; he was pale as death, and looked as if he had been suffering intense agony; his hand was placed on his side.

"What do you here?" at last he said hoarsely.

"I came for you."

He replied sullenly, —

"I am going home."

"Do not move yet, Philip, you may bring on the spasms again."

"How do you know I have had spasms?"

"Because your lips are blue and your eyes bloodshot."

By degrees Philip divulged that, in the race after the two Erle boys, he had brought on palpitation of the heart by over-exertion; he said nothing to Lotty of the rage he had been in.

"We are not above two miles from High Leigh; shall I go home and send the carriage for you?"

"No!" he said; "we return to Court Leigh. I will not have it said that those unmannerly boys drove me away."

"They leave to-morrow for good."

"They may go to the devil!" said Philip, gloomily.

While she bathed his hot forehead with the cool spring water, and his heart grew calmer under the touch of her little fingers, why did not Philip say he thanked her for her true wife's duty?

He pondered over her conduct, it is true, and at last said to himself, "I dare say she has a motive for thus acting."

After a time Philip and Lotty returned slowly home, and the dinner party at Court Leigh passed off much as usual, except that Mrs. Bankes was more quiet, and glanced at Lord Erlscourt when she indulged in any of her favorite remarks, with a sort of pleasing hope that she was not observed.

Harold was extremely gloomy and unsociable, while Basil and his two boys were full of fun and merriment.

Harold looked from time to time beneath his lowering brows, on the fine, frank countenance. The beautiful blue eyes, so serious in a calm mood, so mirthful in a happy one, returned Harold's glances with true brotherly love, and might probably have had a due effect on his moody temperament; but Mr. Herbert was announced, and though he came but to request Margaret's immediate presence at the Rectory, Harold cased himself in an impenetrable cloak of reserve until he left. Then the sweet influence of Margaret's gentle spirit being removed, Harold drank deeply, Mrs. Bankes talked largely, Augusta flirted abominably, Mrs. Royston spent the evening with her child, and Lotty sat by Lady Katherine, with the two Erle boys playing at chess under her surveillance.

Basil had accompanied Gerald home.

Lotty was absolutely and advisedly perpetrating a great act of mischief against Lady Katherine, and, worse than all, making her the principal actor to her own detriment.

"I trust Margaret may be able to return to-night with a pleasing account of Mrs. Herbert."

"I hope so, Lady Katherine; but I suppose you are aware that if all is safely over, Mr. Herbert means still to take his wife to Italy for a year."

"I heard something of that, my dear."

"It will be better to take her there before the winter, rather than she should risk her precious life in precarious uncertainty here. Though the doctor said she might quite recover after her confinement, still Gerald is prepared."

"Extremely judicious, my dear Lotty; but pray with whom does he mean to intrust his parish?"

"That is just the point upon which I thought, Lady Katherine, you could advise. None of us would like a total stranger; so I have bethought myself of a very nice person with whom we were intimate at Beau-court, and who was once curate in this parish before, Mr. Gray."

"My dear, I remember him; a very pleasing young man."

"He has been rector for some time of a small living, within ten miles of Beau-court. He is everywhere loved and respected; and the people here still remember his name with gratitude and affection, though they have not seen him for ten years."

"Quite the gentleman, I remember he was, my dear. By-the-by! yes! — now I think of it — a-hem ——"

Lady Katherine was beginning to remember too much; so Lotty, like a true match-maker, threw her off the scent, saying, —

"He is much more mild and gentle in his doctrines than Gerald; and as the latter does not intend to give him only a curate's salary, but wishes him to have house and tithes, as if he were rector, he will come among us in a very different light to what he was before."

"True, very true. A curate is a curate," said Lady Katherine, "and a rector is a rector. Very handsome of Mr. Herbert, indeed, and, as you say, no stranger to us."

"That will be so agreeable to us all," said Lotty; "he will appear like an old friend."

"I have long thought you very sensible, my dear Lotty; and the contrast of last summer's visit to this one, last summer, when all your kind, amiable relations were here, makes me very sad. I feel as we did when His gracious Majesty was, as it were, under a cloud."

"Ah! Brian, take care, Hugh will checkmate you," interrupted Lotty.

"He may do it as often as he likes, provided I may sit by you," said Brian, stoutly.

"Such a contrast, my dear Lotty," continued Lady Katherine. "That is a very vulgar young woman, Mrs. Bankes; she took it upon herself to give me some advice."

"O! she is always advising, that woman," said Hugh. "Don't mind her, Lady Katherine, for she is a fool."

"I do not go quite as far as you, my dear Hugh."

"O! but you had far better," interrupted Hugh, "for she is an idiot."

"An idiot! pray, who is an idiot?" said the object of their remarks, who was never two minutes in the same place.

Hugh got very red, and was none the less embarrassed upon seeing that Lady Katherine was dependent upon him to get out of the scrape.

Brian came valiantly to the rescue. "We think those people idiots who meddle in other people's matters."

"Very true indeed, very sensible remark; that is what I always say to my friends, Lady Katherine; and if any one was to remark how shamefully Augusta is flirting with Sir Harold, I should say, 'Pray, what business is it of yours?' I should, indeed."

"Madam! what do you mean?" said the astonished Lady Katherine.

"O! it is as plain to see as the nose on one's face, what she is after. Margaret away, too, and he quite foolish from wine."

Lady Katherine walked in a stately manner across to where her son sat; she planted herself firmly and decidedly opposite Augusta. The latter blushed deeply, and drew back, while Harold said, —

"Don't go, Augusta, don't leave me; tell me some more about those countries."

"Sir Harold Leigh, your mother sits before you, and she wishes to know whom you call Augusta?"

Harold had sufficient sense left to discern that his mother was much disconcerted, so he endeavored to command himself.

Not being accustomed to see men in such a state, Lady Katherine contented herself with keeping strict watch over her son, until her chair was announced, without being aware that Mrs. Bankes's remark had any truth in it. She departed in a most stately rustle of indignation, determining that Court Leigh should be cleared of such company on the morrow.

Lotty looked at Philip after Lady Katherine's departure, as if to ask his assistance in persuading Harold to retire, and that the party should break up.

He understood her look without showing any inclination to oblige her. "What was it to him how people conducted themselves?" thus said that dark countenance, as he sat in his quiet corner, caring for none but the little child figure.

Again she appealed to him with a look he had never received from her before.

He grew excited; he would make her come and petition for what she wished, her dark eyes should implore, her sweet lips beseech him to interfere. He knew she only cared thus because it was her Margaret's husband. He had begun to feel, that only through Margaret could he disturb the sweet content her face usually wore.

But he lost sight of her for a moment, as Mrs. Bankes placed herself right in front of him, to favor him with a flowery description of Lady Katherine's looks and words.

Though he interrupted the interesting story without an apology, and left Mrs. Bankes, not even muttering an excuse, in vain he looked round the room — Lotty was gone.

"O!" said his tormentor, "if you are looking for Lotty, of course she has gone to bed, and high time too, for such a child as that. But I don't intend you to go off after her. Let the poor little thing have her first sleep over before you come in with your curtain lecture."

Mrs. Bankes was getting rampant, Margaret, Lord Erlscourt, and Lady Katherine all driven off the field, and Augusta giving her such a fine subject for her usual conversation, she would not lose such an opportunity. Mr. Leigh at last should hear her mind.

She rushed into a vortex of mischief, and was in a high state of happiness, at seeing Philip's countenance becoming darker and more morose, when the door opened and Lotty appeared, accompanied by Margaret. Her disordered curls and glowing cheeks plainly proved to Philip she had been doing anything but sleeping, while Margaret, with serene joy and happiness, went up to Harold and said, —

"Dear Millicent is safe, and has a little daughter!"

"I care nought about it," said the ungracious husband.

No change took place in Margaret, but with placid manner she continued, —

"I am sure you must all be tired, so I will ring for lights."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE morrow was a day of events and consultations. Of the latter, that between Lady Katherine and her son was the longest and most ineffectual, and the one between Lotty and her husband was the shortest and most decisive.

For he said, "Lotty, we go home to-day;" and she answered, "Very well, Philip;" and they went. Not, however, before Lotty had her full share of most of the other consultations, including a long dissertation from Mrs. Royston on the subject of teething, and the angelic way in which her baby submitted to that universal plague of mankind. Why Providence did not ordain that they should cut their teeth when they grew up, formed a never failing subject of discussion and wonder on the part of Mrs. Royston; beginning with the agonies such precious little innocents were made to suffer, the torturing suspense of tender parents while a tooth was coming through, the vast amount of bibs and pinafores damped during the process, and the expense of Mrs. Somebody's soothing syrup, to say nothing of India-rubber rings, &c., &c.

Mrs. Bankes was for taking Augusta roundly to task, which she did for the brief period that the latter allowed her to speak.

"I have always heard that you were celebrated for going great lengths, Augusta, but, for my part, I would never believe it, nor more would Frederick, until we saw what we saw last night. Shameful indeed! and the poor man quite out of himself."

"I have not now to inform you, Mrs. Bankes, that the friendship which subsists between Sir Harold Leigh and myself is warranted by our long acquaintance, to say nothing of my having been originally the first object of his affections."

"Fiddle-de-dee! I know much better than that; and besides, to my innocent mind, that is an additional reason why you should be more circumspect. If you must flirt, my dear, I will lend you my dear Frederick for an evening, knowing full well that the darling fellow will return to his doting wife more fondly than ever: but to fasten yourself to the side of a man who did not know whether he was talking to a man or a woman —— "

"Excuse me, Sir Harold was perfectly aware to whom he was speaking, which I only mention for his sake, as your remarks about myself are — beneath my notice."

"But I think it my duty to tell you what we all think of you, don't we, Lotty?"

"Which it is useless to do, Flo., if she does not think so herself," said Lotty.

"You cannot accuse me of flirting with *your* husband, child," said Augusta, bitterly.

"You are welcome to do so," replied Lotty, quietly.

"Ah! Lotty, you don't know what I know. I was just picking a flower here and there in the garden, and seeing two people in the cedar walk —— "

"Which two people had quite as much right to walk there as you or I, Flo.," interrupted Lotty; "but good-by for the present — I must run over to the Rectory, to inquire after Millicent."

Lotty did not look at Augusta as she left the room, and Mrs. Bankes finished her exordium to the chairs and tables.

As Lotty and Margaret walked back together from the Rectory, they had a consultation which was different from all the others, inasmuch as it began in love and ended so.

"My Queen Meg, we go home to-day."

"O, my Lotty!"

"Yes, you know you and I are under the laws of the Leighs; you have no wish, neither have I, to dispute their wills."

"Ah, Lotty, a different fate is before me. I must dispute my Harold's, I, who could live only to please him."

"But, Margaret, we could not expect Harold to be good all at once, especially as he does not act for the sake of goodness. Let us do as Hope does."

And Lotty repeated, —

"Her bark upon the quicksands,
  Ten thousand floods o'erwhelm;
Hope looked above, — 'This is the time
  For God to take the helm.'"

"But should my resolution fail, Lotty?"

"It will not, Margaret, because it has Duty for its father, and Love for its mother. But you will have much to bear."

"I fear nothing, so that my Harold's good name is not tarnished. I think, Lotty, I could bear the loss of his love, rather than know him to be evil thought of."

"And yet it is his love for you that is his best safeguard at present, Queen Margaret. Somehow the organs of veneration and religion have been doled out to the Leighs in scant measure; pray God we may live to see that mended, Margaret, then we need fear the visits of Flos. and Augustas as little as whisks of the wind or flights of crows; but, Queen Margaret —— "

"My Lotty!"

"I live near you, but you must make up your mind to think me far off."

"Why? my dearest Lotty!"

"Because, because, the Leighs are rather strange, as you know; they like to keep their own property to themselves."

"Do you mean that Philip will prevent your coming to see me? that living so near I shall not have your dear company, your sweet, wise counsel, your loving face to look upon? O Lotty! he never, never can be so cruel."

"He does not mean to be cruel, dear Meg, and it may never happen; but I wish you to be prepared, that you may not think your Lotty unkind, unthoughtful. You must know, Queen Margaret, I am the most to blame — I committed the sin of marrying without love; thus I must bear my lot without a murmur; but as I cannot give Philip that love which I feel in my heart I could give to a husband, I must be the more scrupulous in doing my duty."

"Sweetest, best Lotty! with your child's face and man's wisdom, how you shame me."

"Then you are prepared for Harold's having a reaction, are you, Queen Meg? He has been good a long time, and in the course of nature, one must expect he will now have a bad turn, because his resolutions have no foundation. Can you bear all that is to happen, and know that Lotty, who loves you more than all the rest of the world, is sitting at home and not hovering about you in loving help and sympathy?"

"You will pray for me, Lotty?"

"Faithfully, as I hope for mercy and strength myself. Harold, if left to you and me, we flatter ourselves could be managed; but with that rogue, Price, poor, mistaken Lady Katherine, and that uncompromising Gerald, he will be driven into a state of distraction. He wants money too, does he not?"

"I fear so," said Margaret.

"And I suppose if you were to lessen your establishment by one half, it would be much more comfortable; but Lady Katherine would go into fits, as if the Leighs were born with less of arms, legs, or brains, than other mortals."

"It is quite true, Lotty; a large establishment swallows up money in so great, yet so unsatisfactory a way, that I long to live in a cottage, where, waiting on my Harold myself, love would be the only wages asked, and love should be the only paymaster."

"If it were not for Lady Katherine, I should think Harold would soon see the expediency of such a thing."

"Harold wishes to leave Court Leigh, everything, and settle abroad."

"I should much prefer an honorable economy at home," said Lotty; "a few ill-natured people might wonder, but the blessing of it, the good, the example — besides, I should imagine it was a mistaken notion, that of living cheaper abroad; a person of extravagant habits will be extravagant in Siberia. — But here is Basil, and the two boys are close behind; they have come to bid us farewell, I suppose."

Basil lingered by Margaret's side, as if he saw traces of a hidden grief in her countenance, while the boys uproariously lamented to Lotty that she was not going with them.

"Why should you stop at home with that Philip Leigh, who never speaks a word to you?" said Brian.

"And we would never leave you a moment alone," said Hugh.

"That would be too much of a good thing, Hugh," said Lotty.

"I meant you should never be dull with us," said Hugh.

"I do not think I am dull anywhere," returned Lotty.

"No, that you are not; and I only know, if I were king of the universe, I would have no woman born who is not like you."

"Then you would have too much of a good thing."

"We could never have too much of you, and Basil thinks so too; and though we are going a voyage in the 'Ripple,' yet we are quite sorrowful to leave you."

"And I am in sorrow about another thing," said Hugh. "I should like to have kicked Mr. Bankes before I went."

"Why? poor, unfortunate, meek man!" said Lotty.

"Just to astonish Mrs. Bankes," returned Hugh.

"I did not know you were such bad boys."

"We are not very bad boys, for we went this morning and kissed Milly's baby, which nurse said showed we were kind-hearted boys; but, Mrs. Leigh, when I kissed the baby I said something to Hugh."

"What was it?"

"Shall I tell, Hugh?"

"Yes, you may as well, Brian, because, perhaps, she will," whispered Hugh.

"I said, I wished I might kiss you instead of the baby."

"Whenever I have any kisses to give, you two shall have them."

"Thank you! when do you think that will happen?" said Hugh.

"That is more than I can say."

"But you are always kissing Bear," said Brian.

"Because no one else does."

"Then no one shall kiss me but you, if you will treat me the same."

"Come, come, do not let us have any more such childish nonsense," said Lotty. "I think you both very fine boys, and I like you both very much, and that you can believe without any saluting."

"Ah!" said Brian, sorrowfully; "it is all that Philip."

"What is all this sighing and groaning about, eh?" said Basil.

"Mrs. Leigh will not give us each a kiss, now that we are going away, and may be drowned or shipwrecked."

"You impudent boys! how could you think of making such a request to Mrs. Leigh? Mrs. Bankes, or Miss Clare, now ——"

"Ha, ha! brother, we will give you all our share, should such ever fall to our lot; but we will keep Mrs. Leigh's."

"No, no," said Basil, "the man who has a right to salute Mrs. Leigh's cheek, knows his happiness, and values it too well to share it."

"You are one more foolish than another," pouted Lotty.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Philip Leigh returned home. "Now I shall begin seriously," said he to himself, "to work my will."

Lotty was always in the habit of rising with the sun. The fresh beauty of the young day was like life to her frame, the deep stillness of the yet sleeping earth raised her soul to the confines of Heaven, from whence came the roseate harbingers of the sun.

This time was to Lotty what happy dreams are to the sick and weary. She gathered in fresh spirit and resolution for the duties of the day, as the Israelites of old gathered their manna.

Many a kind action, many a timely visit, did Lotty pay during these early hours, making the poor people think that one of the ministering angels, that watch and guard the dwellings of men at night, had forgotten to seek her place in Heaven, when day revealed the secrets of earth.

And she would appear at breakfast, her clear skin glowing with the pink hue of the pearl shell, her eyes like glittering dewdrops, her whole appearance so fresh and fragrant, that Philip felt, as she sat opposite his dark moody countenance, that she would deem herself more unmatched with him than ever. So he forbade the early excursions.

In vain Bear's impatient whine was heard, now at the door, now below the window, now at the gate; his lazy little mistress was in bed.

In perceiving that this prohibition really had an effect upon Lotty's spirits, Philip lost sight of the danger to her health. She had said, in her usual quiet manner, "Very well, Philip."

And while he rejoiced that it seemed to tame her, or rather subdue her, he did not know that he was depriving her of life.

Lotty grew pale, then languid; then she lay, when not wanted by Philip, on the grass, on a sofa, anywhere, so that it was recumbent. Bear was without doubt a miserable dog; and while no word escaped Lotty's lips of either complaint or remonstrance, Bear expressed, in canine language, that he was on the verge of distraction. How long Philip, in his blind selfishness, might have continued the experiment, cannot be known. But Lotty's nurse interfered.

Having been born and bred among the Beauvillians, it never entered her innocent and unsuspecting heart that there lived people who not only could, and did, torment their fellow-creatures, but who plagued those they loved best.

She concluded that this new arrangement proceeded from a whim of her nursling's; and finding all her private remonstrances to her (as well they might be) unavailing, she thought it but right to appeal to Mr. Leigh herself.

"Yes! Mr. Leigh, but she is the pet of the world, for all she is so wilful. If you don't lay the law of a husband on her, she will slip through our fingers."

"Of whom are you speaking, my good woman?"

"Of Miss Lotty, sir," said nurse, angrily, and advisedly oblivious of her married condition. "Don't you see how ill she is?"

"I have noticed she looks a little pale lately, but thought it was the heat."

"It is no such thing, Mr. Leigh, it is all her own fault, for not getting in the fresh air of a morning; all the Beauvilliers family are the same. The fresh morning air is meat, and drink, and life to them. And look at the change in only a fortnight come Tuesday."

"Pooh—pooh!" said Philip, "old nurses' tales."

"Old nurses' tales, indeed! then just call her to come to you, from under that tree where she is now lying. If she comes to you with the step she had ten days ago, I never nursed her."

"Pooh—pooh!" said Philip again; but he called her.

She looked round, as if she only half heard him.

"Ay! ay! she would have been by your side ere this ten days ago," said nurse.

He called again, quicker and sharper in tone, for he really feared.

She rose hastily, and seemed as if about to run, but her step faltered; she held out her arms as if to catch something; and feeling the faithful, loving Bear, she clasped him close, half-sinking on the ground. Philip flew to her, the nurse following. With half-closed eyes, and white, parted lips, lay that loveliest, fairest thing.

"She has fainted," said the nurse. "Don't touch her," as Philip wildly tried to clasp her in his arms; "the dog will do you a mischief. I will get some water; see, she is better already. Here, fan her with her hat, but do not unclasp her hands from the dog's neck, for your life. I know how he took on when she was so ill, after her father's death."

As Philip looked at the innocent victim of his selfish caprice, he could have sworn her a lifetime of devotion and love, so that she would but look at him once. It seemed as if, even in a fainting fit, Lotty must obey his wishes, for she opened her eyes and looked at him. He poured out upon her the fondest, tenderest words.

At last she said, —

"I rose too quickly, Philip; it made me giddy."

"But why are you thus weak and ill? — O Lotty! my Lotty!"

"I do not know, Philip; but perhaps I am going to die."

"Die! Lotty; die! ah, Lotty!"

"I feel as if I should, Philip."

"O Lotty! talk not thus; you agonize me. Death can never touch one so fair as you."

"I shall go to my father, Philip," said Lotty, quickly, and with a faint smile.

Philip's heart beat with a strange fluttering sensation he had felt twice before. He put his hand to his side — his lips became blue.

She would prefer death to living with him. That was all he had gained by his late experiment.

"Nurse, give Philip some water first; see, his heart beats so, and that might bring on spasms."

Lotty was never again forbidden to seek the heaven's nutriment her peculiar frame required. She got as rapidly strong again as she had become ill.

Philip went to consult a doctor about his heart; who told him there was no disease at present, but he must avoid all violent emotions, to prevent any return of spasms. And this advice was given to a man who never gave his heart a moment's peace or holy calm.

CHAPTER XLV.

WHILE Philip was enacting the part of a tender and judicious husband at High Leigh, Harold was keeping up the same character at Court Leigh.

Their visitors had departed. Mrs. Bankes having declared, in a private consultation with her husband, that they had all become more stupid than owls now that Lotty was gone, made her dear Frederick declare that urgent business called him to London.

Mrs. Royston was beginning to think that the air of Cheshire did not suit the operation of teething; besides, the Leighs lived five miles from the nearest medical man — a fact that had kept poor Mrs. Royston in a perpetual state of alarm — and many times had the unwilling young 'Squire to go the last thing at night to the stables, to desire a man and horse to be kept in readiness, at a moment's notice, in consequence of some unusual symptoms of uncomfortableness on the part of young Master Royston.

"Though," as Carry declared to her husband, "it was only one word for their baby and two for Margaret's, who, she was certain, would have a fit that night, it looked so remarkably redundant in health and spirits."

Augusta still remained, but she was only waiting an escort to London. The same train could not have held her and Mrs. Bankes without an explosion; or, as Mr. Bankes elegantly expressed it, "their coming to bats." Harold seemed, after his steady pursuit of active and worthy habits, to have become, all at once, an exaggerated edition of his former self. In vain the devoted Margaret tried every winning way, made use of every wife-like art, to subdue his morose, unkind mood. Brooding over his want of money, and the dilemma he had placed himself in by commencing so vigorously the repair of his estate, without counting the cost, he, like many men before him, laid the blame of his present unfortunate condition on another. And that other was his wife.

Margaret had been the originator, the instigator, the adviser, the encourager of it all. And Margaret would not listen to his wishes to give all up, and go with him to any other country than that which contained Court Leigh. And this was that same Margaret who, early in their married life, deprecated his departure from her side but an hour, even for what he deemed necessary; who had thought that the world, including their tenants and people in particular, might dissolve into emptiness and vapor, sooner than that her Harold should be annoyed. It needed no poisonous whisperer by his side to make Margaret appear at this time a stumbling-block in the way of his happiness and content.

In the heat of some of his arguments, he had told her of his banker's account. " Sell some outlying estate to clear the rest," said Margaret.

It was all entailed.

" Let us reduce our establishment," she suggested. But in this plan she met with most strenuous opposition from Lady Katherine. This stern but amiable old lady had deemed it no more than her bounden duty to keep ward and watch all day long while Augusta remained at Court Leigh; and as she imagined that nothing was ever done or said that she ought not to have a voice in the matter, she had arrived at a much greater knowledge of her son's affairs than he ever intended she should. But he was not ill-pleased when he found she sided with him against his wife, in the matter of reducing their establishment.

" Court Leigh had ever been kept up in a style that no family in Cheshire could exceed," said she.

" But there is no reason why we should do so, dear Lady Katherine," pleaded Margaret. " Such state as we keep does not add to our happiness, but rather increases our cares."

" It should never be reported in the country that the Leighs did such a thing; it would be my deathblow," said Lady Katherine.

" Nay," answered sweet Margaret, " what is the country to us, if we are in debt? Every year will but add to our difficulties, until the end will be worse than what we fear now."

" For my part I cannot conceive how such a state of things has occurred," said Lady Katherine. " Price must have been grossly deficient in his duties towards you, my dear son, and I can only advise you to make him refund."

" He says I am in debt to him five thousand pounds, mother," said Harold

"Monstrous!" said his mother, "quite monstrous! I would have him taken up and put into gaol until he confessed the whole matter."

Lady Katherine's advice and ideas upon the subject by no means tended to lighten it in any way. No child could be more ignorant of the real case, and no queen more resolute to keep her state and crown, though it was clear to others she had neither.

Margaret grew pale and sorrowful, but the soft eyes never varied in their look of devoted love; the sweet lips could utter no words but endearing persuasions to act with firm and upright decision. And she was alone in her thorny path; no Basil to encourage the wayward Harold; no Millicent to bid her work on in faith and hope; no sweet Lotty to soothe, encourage, and point out some happy medium path.

Margaret sat in her garden by the newly-made grave of Harold's favorite — that petted and beloved horse, which had, by its traits of instinct and affection, first won for Harold the glance of the eyes and interest in the heart of the sweetest, gentlest being on earth. The horse had died from inflammation, caused by being overridden. His death was sufficient grief to Harold, without being told by Mr. Herbert that his own passionate mood had prompted the mad gallop, his own temper had inflicted this fresh grief.

Harold had shut himself up, after a series of insulting epithets poured upon Gerald, that made the latter mourn over the wretched change, and had not been seen since.

Margaret had desired the servants to bury the favorite in the sweetest spot of her garden; and, when the last sod was placed over him, she came in lonely silence to ask God, from her heart, to spare her this bitter cup. So pure, so devoted was her love for Harold, that she asked for no return of his love to her, but that he should perform his duty to God and his people. Anything she could bear towards herself, so that he was irreproachable in character and name.

She felt arms thrown round her, and sweet kisses given her.

"My Lotty!"

"Queen Margaret, how ill you look!"

"And you also, Lotty. It is three weeks since I have seen you — O, my sweet Lotty!" And Margaret wept uncontrollable tears.

"Dear Meg! weep on, it will relieve you. I know my school-wife has been very unhappy, and you know you can-pour out your sorrows to your little school-husband without fear."

No, not even to that little, faithful school-husband could the loyal wife utter one word against Harold.

"I feel low and out of spirits, Lotty."

"When does Harold go? I hear he intends trying 'The Marguerite' this summer."

"He leaves on Monday, after the rent-day; but he will not take a long excursion this year."

"Do you go with him?"

"No, dear; it is deemed unwise for me to do so, because, you know, sweet Lotty, your little goddaughter is coming soon."

"How unlucky that you should have all this to undergo at such a time; and I — ah! Queen Margaret, I have but come to say farewell!"

"How, Lotty?"

"Philip is going abroad."

"When, and for how long, and where, dearest Lotty?"

"I know nothing more than that we go to-morrow; where, or for how long, I am ignorant. But you will have Milly, darling Meg," continued Lotty, her own tears falling as she saw Margaret's despair.

"Lotty, where you are there always seems to me less of sin and the world's deceit. Though I have seen so little of you lately, it was pleasant to think I had but to send for you — it was more than pleasant, it was my best worldly comfort. Well, if more must be borne, God grant me strength to bear it! As you say, I shall have dear Milly; and, Lotty, she is recovering wonderfully; Dr. Murray has scarcely any fears. But, Lotty, my sweetest, dearest Lotty, my cares are doubled. When you go, it seems as if some goodness left me."

"Well, it is a great comfort to be so missed," said Lotty, with an attempt at cheerfulness; "so now come with me, to bid Lady Katherine and Pru. farewell, and the dear Milly. When I am away, I shall be writing forever, and have a great deal to tell you. And as I may go to some unknown scenes and places, you may amuse yourself with publishing my interesting and original documents, and saving up any emolument that you may gain thereby for my goddaughter." Thus Lotty chatted on, and no one would have believed that the little, lively thing bore within her a heart that ached more than all.

Lotty knew Philip Leigh had a purpose in this sudden arrangement, and in taking her from England, her friends, her companions — not even permitting her nurse to go with her, in giving her no clew to his plans, no explanation of his intentions, she defined that her fortitude and patience were to be put to some severe test — some extraordinary trials. To her tender, loving nature, the leaving Margaret was sufficient to almost tear her heart in sunder.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Though Philip had given Lotty but twenty-four hours' notice, during which time she had to make her leave-taking visits, and to reconcile her dear old nurse to her absence — a very difficult task, and not completed either — she and Bear were ready at the appointed hour.

"I am not going to be troubled with that dog."

For a moment Lotty turned white. Then recovering on the instant, she kissed him between the eyes, and sprang into the carriage.

They were to go to Liverpool, eighteen miles, in their own carriage.

Whether in that last kiss Lotty had given Bear any private instructions, could not be ascertained; but on arriving at the hotel which they usually frequented, the first object that greeted their sight was Bear.

And Lotty seemed in no degree surprised. Philip waited until they were in the sitting-room, and then, in a loud and angry voice, he swore he would send the dog back. Bear growled as he heard the angry tones.

Philip struck him sharply with a riding-whip.

Instantly the dog sprang up, with a howl of rage, but not quicker than Lotty, who, placing herself in front of her husband, received the huge form of Bear on her slight figure, every bristle raised, his eyes of a glaring red.

Philip shuddered as he saw those sharp, glistening fangs within an inch of the small, white throat, and knew that, when blinded with rage, such bloodhounds as Bear saw not friend from foe.

"Ah! Bear, be good; is this like a gentleman? are these your manners? would you hurt poor Lotty?"

The bristles fell, the tail drooped; Bear turned away his huge jaws, his eyes assumed a penitent and subdued look, and with a whine of apology, he crouched at the feet of his little mistress.

"The dog is far too savage to be loose," said Philip; "I'll have his proud spirit curbed with the whip."

"No, Philip, you must not beat him, for then you will, indeed, make him savage."

"As soon as Ross has done his horses, I'll have the hound chained up, and a good flogging will teach him not only obedience, but better manners."

Lotty looked at Philip with the first symptoms of defiance he had ever seen in her eyes towards him. And he was not much mistaken in reading contempt there also. But he left the room to issue his orders; and when he returned, after the lapse of an hour, he found Lotty prepared for the dinner that had been ordered for them, and Bear sleeping quietly under the sofa. Lotty was pale, but her eyes dark and brilliant.

"Send my servant here," said Philip to the waiter.

"You must not have my dog beaten," said Lotty, calmly.

"I intend to have him beaten," said Philip, coldly.

"I would rather that you shot him, Philip."

"I see no use in that, Lotty. I mean but to tame him."

"That is not true, Philip, you know; with a nature like a hound's, you ruin him if you beat him."

"We will see about that," said Philip, "after the operation is over. He can then be shot if he proves worthless."

"He shall be shot before he is beaten," said Lotty; "here are your pistols. I have got them ready."

As she handed him one of the pistols, her cheek grew paler, her eyes darker and more resolute; she held the other in her hand.

The servant was heard approaching.

"Come here, Bear," said Lotty.

The noble hound was by her side as she spoke.

"Will you shoot my dog, if you do not like him, Philip, rather than have him beaten?"

"No; he shall be flogged."

"Then I shoot him myself," said Lotty.

Philip heard the click of the lock; she placed the pistol to the loving dog's ear, who was looking up at her with pleased intelligence.

"Keep to one side," she said. "Now, my Bear, farewell. You take Lotty's heart with you."

An irresistible impulse to give him one more kiss saved Bear's life.

Philip caught her hand.

"I did not know you were such a fool about the dog. He shall not be flogged."

"On your word, Philip?"

"On my word."

She took his hand, looked at it for a moment, and then said, "Thank you, Philip." Still holding the hand, she continued,—"Is Bear to go home with Ross, or remain with us?" As Philip hesitated to reply, she said,—

"I am afraid, Philip, he will find us out, wherever we are."

"Then take him with you."

"Thank you, Philip," and she touched his hand with her lips.

Her face resumed its usual color, and her pretty, playful manner returned; she and Bear had quite a scene of love and adoration, enacted in whispers and dumb show.

Presently Lotty rose, and bringing Philip a glass of water, asked him if his heart pained him.

"A little," he allowed.

In fact, this strange, wayward man, thus battling with his own happiness, was contending with several very different emotions. He was baffled, and she victorious. That went against the grain. He was really irritated against the dog, and his unkind nature longed to inflict punishment, no matter what effect it had upon him.

But the resolute daring of the childlike wife, the ease and fearless way in which she handled the pistols, and the determined courage with which she prepared to destroy the creature she loved so well, rather than have it suffer, excited his warmest admiration. And then the simple earnestness with which she said, "Thank you, Philip," the unsolicited touch of her lips, though but upon his hand, sent the blood rushing wildly through his heart, with a feeling of ecstasy he could scarce define himself. For amid all the love he bore the little child-wife, yet stronger rose the spirit of pride and self-will within him. This was the life he had longed for, this the excitement that was to color his days with alternate visions of clouds and rosy skies, and which was to indemnify him for having placed himself at all within the dull noose of matrimony. And yet strong must be the love which caused that proud heart to throb thus, though he could say to himself, "I will let her keep the dog; through his means I may gain greater hold over that wild spirit."

That he could love thus, yet think thus, gave him an insight into his feelings that puzzled and provoked him by their strangeness.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE good angels appointed to guide the steps of the Leighs must have abandoned their posts — gloomy and irascible was the heretofore indolent Harold. In vain Margaret became, in her loving wife's duty, so sweet, so gentle, so thoughtful, the essence of a dozen Margarets seemed to emanate from her. Harold neither looked at nor spoke to her. What mattered it to him if she was good, and amiable, and loving, beyond all comparison, she yet would not give way in one thing. "The Marguerite" was her rival. As such, Margaret hated her with a cordial, honest dislike, that never swerved amid all her gentleness. The more Harold grew to know that she was immovable, the more did he harden his heart, and elevate "the Marguerite" to the highest place in his regard, and consequently her rival fell in proportion. Like Philip, he fed and nourished himself on this excitement; he loved to think himself a victim; he grew enamoured of the struggle, caring little, in this strange charm of novelty, whether he was right or wrong; Margaret should give way, should learn to like, to live in, to make a home of her rival. When she had spent a year with him cruising about the lovely shores of the Mediterranean, then he would give way. Margaret might take her rival, sell her, burn her, destroy every vestige and trace of her; she alone should reign Queen Margaret as heretofore. But he would have his own way first.

On the rent-day all went well. The tenants were loud in their expressions of gratitude for all that their landlord had been lately doing for them, and with a good feeling appeared to a man, and what was of more consequence, every man seemed to make it a point of honor to have no arrears. Every farthing was paid down with cheerful alacrity, every old debt settled. It should be through no fault of theirs, if their young landlord was discouraged in his present good course.

If Harold had been in a better mood, he could not have failed to be touched by the exhibition of feelings until now unknown to him.

But his first act on the following morning was to desire that one half of the proceeds of the rent-day should be sent to certain agents at Cowes, for the payment of "the Marguerite." Part he had already paid, and this last sum would complete her purchase. In vain Mr. Price expostulated, in vain Messrs. Moneypenny threatened, in vain they all called upon Lady Leigh to use her influence. That soft pleading, those gentle entreaties, became as so much oil on the raging flames, and he made no other answer than an order for his servant to pack up, and an offer to Miss Clare to escort her to Cowes.

While Margaret mourned over the one deed, Lady Katherine boiled over the other, and after the most approved manner of courtly fashion, gave her son the benefit thereof.

It did not lessen the evil feelings filling his heart, that the forbearing Margaret had every reason to complain, yet said nothing, while the indignant Lady Katherine had in reality nothing on which to found her accusations, yet railed herself into a belief of their truth.

So, with a stern, haughty composure covering his inward rage, Harold proceeded, for the second time since they were married, to bid his Margaret farewell. One cold kiss he gave her, but a little sting of remorse penetrated his heart as she held up his boy, saying, with her eyes, "At least give him my kisses, for I can take them from him when you leave him." He clasped the boy in his arms, kissed him many times, lovingly and fondly, and caught, as he gave him back to Margaret, that look of love and devotion her eyes knew so well how to express, while a flush of pleasure tinged her pure cheek with more loveliness than usual. All the leave he took of his mother was a haughty bow as he seated himself in the carriage by Miss Clare's side, both of which acts made her bridle up with supreme indignation and disgust. But Margaret caught a last look, as the carriage turned up the avenue, and was comforted.

Like the Egyptian king, Harold tried to harden his heart the whole journey; but that loving glance melted down the granite thing whenever he thought of it, and he arrived at Cowes almost in an amiable mood. It even crossed his mind he would write to Margaret. Miss Clare had been amiable, and kind, and rational. Indeed, she always took care not to offend Harold's real feelings of honor and rectitude when quite himself. And therefore, in some measure he may be excused thinking her not so bad as she was painted to him; for he never remembered what happened on certain evenings.

She invited him to live at her brother's house, until "the Marguerite" was ready, which offer he gladly accepted. And she knew that her welcome there would be much warmer, bringing a rich young Baronet with her. For much might be made out of him in various ways; besides the consequence it would give to have such a guest residing with a falling family, a tarnished name.

"The Marguerite" was a very handsome schooner screw yacht, exactly suited for the ocean home of a family, being between two to three hundred tons burden. Harold was soon absorbed in all the bustle and pleasure of fitting her out. He had only two drawbacks to his happiness; he really wanted Margaret, and in spite of his anger, felt he could enjoy nothing without her. And secondly, Mrs. Bankes was in Cowes, and he stumbled over her at all corners. She did not mend his mood by the remarks with which she favored him whenever they met.

"So you and Augusta are going off together, are you?" says she; "well, I hope you are prepared to leave your characters behind you. People will talk, you know, all I can say, and they wonder Lady Leigh allows such things. Poor soul! say I, she cannot help herself, she is tied by the leg. Bless me! he is gone; well to be sure, how his eyes flashed. For my part, spite of Lord Erlscourt, I think those Leighs are mad. It would be doing no more than my duty to give Margaret a hint of how matters are going on here. Though it is of no use writing to her, I declare I'll give a hint to that poor little old maid, Miss Leigh; she will tell her mother directly, though I dare say the old lady opens all her letters first, to see that none are from lovers. No fear of that—ha! ha! poor old soul! However, I will write; it is my duty to prevent any evil occurring to my dear schoolfellow; Fred., I know, will be quite angry with me if I don't. I hear they start for Jersey to-morrow, a large party of them. A great shame Fred. and I were not asked. I have been wishing to go that identical trip for so long, and I am a more proper chaperon for Augusta than her gay sister-in-law. In fact, I don't think any of the party have much to boast of, in the way of discreetness; and now I think of it, I feel sure my dear Fred. would not like to see me mixed up with such a questionable lot. And I shall tell Miss Leigh that is the reason I did not accompany them, otherwise my feelings for my dear Margaret would have made me sacrifice everything to oblige her ——"

Mrs. Bankes's soliloquies never ended, apparently.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MARGARET was writing to her Harold; forgetful of his late unkindness, regardless of his cold farewell, unmindful of his injustice, she was pouring out her heart's warmest, best feeling to assuage the grief he must feel on hearing a bitter piece of news. Price had absconded with all that was left of the half-year's rents, and with whatever other matters of value he could lay his hands upon.

Sir Harold's absence ,had enabled him to mature his plans. He went from his house to Liverpool with the ostensible purpose of placing the rents in Messrs. Moneypenny's hands, but had taken advantage of a vessel going straight to the gold-diggings, and had been gone four days ere the fact was discovered.

"My Harold, let me come to you," wrote the fond wife. "It will, indeed, be as well for us to leave home for a year, that we may at once put an end to the drain of our large establishment; we can no longer contend, love, against the tide of our ill-fortune. But let us face the evil calmly, for it is not hopeless. Messrs. Moneypenny have been here. They are willing, nay, most anxious, to accommodate us in every way. They will, with your permission, appoint a trustworthy agent of their own, who will manage the estates with zeal and care. They promise to proceed with the repairs, appropriating a third of the rents for that purpose. They will reserve another third for themselves, to pay off the incumbrance due to them, and give us the last portion on which to live: surely, dear Harold, we can live in luxury and content upon two thousand three hundred and thirty pounds a year, and even less ——"

She had reached this point of the letter, her lovely face beaming with the thought that with him half that sum would be sufficient for her, when the door opened. Mr. Herbert entered; his usually calm and thoughtful face was flushed and agitated, while a solemn pity beamed from his eyes. Clasping the hand she held out to him, he breathed a low prayer for strength and fortitude, "that he might tell, and she might hear, what God had appointed them."

"My Harold!" exclaimed Margaret.

He bowed in assent.

"Not dead?" she whispered, in a tone that seemed to Gerald like the sigh of some mournful imprisoned spirit.

"'Twere better had he been taken from us, he answered.

A low, deep sigh, half a sob, escaped from Margaret; she was relieved from the worst fear.

"I am ready; tell me."

"He has gone — he has fled from England, he has left every duty, every tie; for, Lady Leigh, he is not alone."

"It is a mistake," answered Margaret, calmly.

"I fear not." said Gerald, mournfully. "Lady Katherine knows more than we do; she has had letters to confirm what is now in the newspaper. It was she bade me come to you; it was at her wish ——"

"The paper?" asked Margaret, still and calm as stone, holding her hand out for it.

Awed by her manner, he gave it to her. Scarcely disguising names, in broad hints, and pointed allusions, with vulgar remarks and family facts, lay exposed to Margaret's swimming vision, an implied elopement of Sir Harold Leigh and Miss Clare. The yacht "Marguerite," family embarrassments, defalcation of agent, private affairs, misunderstandings and quarrels, a mixture of slight truth and monstrous falsehood, burned themselves, like letters of fire, into Margaret's heart. That name, her Harold's name, to be thus blasted — that character, her Harold's fine, frank character, to be thus vilified — she drew herself up to her full height, she turned upon Gerald her glowing face, radiant with a noble purity, while from her eyes beamed an indignation so virtuous and exalted, he bent his stern soul before it.

The beauty of mercy, the depth of holy pity, the wonderful strength of compassionate love, rose before his mental vision. He stood humble and abashed at his rigid sternness, his cold judgment of a fellow-mortal. He felt like the servant who owed his Lord ten thousand talents, and was frankly forgiven that enormous debt. Yet was he not exacting the hundred pence from a weak, erring fellow-servant?

"Forgive me!" he exclaimed.

"Thank you, Gerald," answered Margaret; "now you must help me to clear my Harold's name."

"Command me. Let me go to Cowes; intrust me with the discovery of the author of such slanders."

"I will go with you; yes, Gerald, who so proper to greet the eyes of one injured in so tender a point as his wife? On landing, Harold might hear some odious whisper; he will raise his eyes in indignation, and behold his Margaret, and then ——" She paused.

Gerald looked up, a deadly paleness overspread the late glowing features; a pang of mortal agony and pain sent the blood shuddering through her frame. He caught her as she faltered.

It might be that the many fears and trials of the past few months had weakened her, it might be the one sudden shock, which, on a frame so sensitive, affected body and mind alike. As her agony passed away and her color returned, she said, "Give me my letter — I must write, write instead; ring for my maid, Gerald." She wrote rapidly, adding a few fond, loving sentences to her former letter.

"Now go, Gerald, take my Harold this letter; tell him the cause that prevents me being with you, and in my coming hour of peril, O, Gerald, remember, no pang of bodily anguish that I shall endure, will equal the mental pain I suffer until my Harold's name is cleared!"

"God do so to me, and more also, if I wrong him again," said Gerald. "I will now go and undeceive Lady Katherine."

"Thanks, thanks," she could say no more. In the bustle and confusion always consequent upon an event occurring unexpectedly, many necessary and proper precautions were forgotten; or perhaps Margaret's constitution was really weakened by her late trials. But from whatever cause, Lotty's little goddaughter was born in such an hour of pain and danger, that the poor mother heard not her first cries; she lay for many hours, wholly unconscious, her spirit hovering between life and death.

Gerald had failed to convince Lady Katherine, who, after writing to her son, had established herself by Margaret's unconscious side, while he proceeded to Cowes.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LADY KATHERINE had, at first, sat down stunned, as it were, with the fulfilment of her fears. Then she awoke to the fact that she must act in a becoming and proper manner for the occasion. She called to mind all the occasions in which the blessed Queen Charlotte had been placed in somewhat similar circumstances, through the unbridled habits of her own princely sons.

Ever anxious to act, on all occasions, after the manner of her august example, if it unhappily fell out she was to do so under such painful circumstances, still she would do it. Her son had disgraced the name of Leigh — he was her son no longer. He had outraged every feeling of love and duty to both his wife and herself; therefore he must be considered as dead to both of them until ——

Here Lady Katherine paused. An idea shot through the obtuseness of her mind that Harold was her son after all — her only son. Her life would be almost, if not quite a blank without him. Nevertheless, the world would expect her to act in a becoming manner; at least she must show she had not had the advantage of a great and high example without being able to profit thereby. So, in grand and magnanimous language, she indited a letter to her son. She painted in high colors the crimes of which she presumed him guilty; she forbade him her sight, until time, remorse, and proper feelings should urge him to seek her forgiveness. She should interdict his name, hitherto so beloved, now so stained, being mentioned to her. She darkly hinted at his wife's horror and indignation leading to separation, perhaps divorce; and, winding up with an heroic finale, she commended him to the powers of an outraged Heaven.

Lady Katherine read her letter over to herself, in pleasing approbation of the pith and force of her words, and then sealing and sending it, she proceeded to give Gerald the audience he was craving, receiving him with the air of a Roman mother, and the dignity proper for the late bedchamber-woman of good Queen Charlotte to show.

Mr. Herbert found it vain to reason with her. He thought it best to proceed at once to Cowes, and act as he knew Margaret would wish. So sending Lady Katherine to her daughter's bedside, thanking God for the mercy that had opened his heart, and freed him from a crime such as Lady Katherine's appeared now to him, he took leave of his Milly, and departed.

At Cowes he found Basil, already working zealously in the same cause. To no one could they exactly trace the origin of the rumor. Some said the character of the Clares warranted it; others, it seemed strange that Sir Harold should have left his wife and consorted with such people; while one and all declared, upon their honor, they had never spread such reports. Loudest among these was Mrs. Bankes; and while the good Gerald took her at her word, the more worldly-wise Basil alarmed her so much with his hints and remarks regarding the punishment due to the authors of such slanders, that she packed up her things and left Cowes forthwith. Her fears got the better of her curiosity; dying, as she was, with anxiety to witness the denouement of the affair, she persuaded her dear Fred. that they should glean much better accounts from the papers, and that, at all events, it was desirable they should avoid getting dragged into the mess. To this "dear Fred." readily agreed.

Meantime, at the back of the island, in a snug little bay, was the object of all their hopes, thoughts, and wishes. "The Marguerite" had returned from her cruise in the Channel Islands, and to please Miss Clare and her companions, perhaps also himself, Harold had consented to coast round the island ere they finally landed.

The effect of the short voyage he had taken riveted in Harold's heart the chains of "the Marguerite" over him. But the constant intercourse such close companionship as a vessel brought him into with his present guests was a counterbalance.

Exquisite was the sensation of gliding over the fair but solemn sea, holding in its vast green bosom such hoards of mysteries, such countless lives, such boundless riches, and such mighty powers! But the light laughter of an uncongenial spirit jarred upon Harold's nerves. His gay companions thought this object of his love and veneration was merely the sea, who might prove very disagreeable and make them feel ill, and look so. Now, with Margaret, this would be different.

In the night time, when he gazed on the stars, looking down, as it were, on a firmament as clear as their own, what answer could he get from one of his companions to the solemn thoughts arising within him? The rattle of the dice-box below in the cabin, the wild song, the hasty language, were all he could hope for. With Margaret he might have interchanged thoughts that would have drawn them still closer together. So, with all his late feelings softening towards her, he would pace the deck half the night, and think of nothing but his Margaret. An irresistible impulse induced him to write to her, and post the letter at Jersey.

After giving her an account of his journey, whom he had with him, what they intended doing, he wound up thus: —

"And now, sweet Meg, take those kisses from your boy. They are yours, and yours only. Forgive your wayward Harold. Remember that one such look as you gave me, when we parted, revenges you well. I see in the stars now above me, two such angel lights that seem to tell me what a brute I am. And up from the bosom of the sea come liquid soft glances, saying, 'Cruel Harold!' 'Tis in vain that I close my eyes, trying to shut out the remembrance of your last look. It haunts me, sweet wife; may it do so ever! Then, when I return home, Queen Margaret shall say she has no more loving subject than her HAROLD."

Margaret had been ill and insensible three days when this letter arrived at Court Leigh.

So Harold returned to the Isle of Wight in a softened and kind mood; and though he might have felt anxious to return home, he put into Newtown late one evening, with the full determination of taking his guests all round the coast, as he had promised. But he sent his servant over to Cowes for his letters, with orders to be with him as early as possible in the morning. The man brought but one, and, within half an hour of receiving it, Sir Harold sent orders to his captain to make all sail.

"Where to?" demanded the captain.

The steward went down to inquire, but came up again in double-quick time.

"Where you like," he muttered, "so it's away from this cursed island; and I am not sure if he did not say 'to the devil!'"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the captain.

"It will be that letter he got; he is in a rare tantrum, and there's not a bit of the letter left as big as the tip of my finger."

"Well, the hotter the passion, the sooner it is over; so I'll obey orders to weigh, and get away from the island. May be, by six bells he will know his own mind."

Sir Harold's guests were much surprised to find on rising that they were many miles from land, and that he did not appear out of his cabin; but as they were nothing loth for a longer voyage, the two facts concerned them very little.

Meantime a rumor reached Cowes that "the Marguerite" had put into Newtown. Basil and Gerald posted off there without a moment's delay. They arrived in time to see "the Marguerite" just disappearing on the horizon.

"Let us haste back," said Basil; "'the Ripple' is ready for sea, we may hope to overtake her."

"The screw yacht," said a sailor, on hearing him, "has very little coal on board; she can't go far."

"How do you know?" asked Gerald.

"Some of the crew were ashore last night, and said as how they meant only to coast round the island; they took in fresh stores for a day or two."

No time was lost; Gerald outdid Basil in his exertions; and by noon they were well out to sea.

"We are going to have a dirty night of it," said the captain of the "Ripple" to Basil.

"Care for nought, so you overtake 'the Marguerite,'" was the reply.

"What course was she taking? for we might miss her in the night."

"What! cannot we come up with her before night?" exclaimed Gerald.

"She had six hours' start, sir, and we have not sighted her yet. If you could tell me whither she was bound, I might be able to form a judgment."

"That I cannot tell; she seemed to have gone off suddenly, without a purpose, making for the coast of Holland."

"If the wind keeps on this tack, and she is short of coal, she must about-ship. No sea-going captain will trust his craft, in dirty weather, too near the coast of Holland. The shoals there soon swallow their prey."

"Do you know any thing of the captain of 'the Marguerite?'"

"Nothing, my lord; he was just taken at a venture, Sir Harold was in such a hurry to be off."

"I cannot think," said Basil, pacing uneasily up and down his little deck, "what caused Harold to go again in such a hurry. Could he have heard any of the rumors at Newtown? It is just like him to take the pet, and go off again in a tangent."

"Ha!" said Gerald, "a thought strikes me — his mother wrote to him; I remember she boasted to me of having done so. He has received it, and here, here is the panacea for all he might feel, now in my possession. Not an hour of the time since it was given me have I failed to feel that it was safe, ready to put into Harold's hand the moment I saw him."

"Your conjecture must be right," answered Basil; "he has received his mother's letter, and none from Margaret. Poor Harold!"

"We pursue at every risk?" demanded Gerald.

"Yes," responded Basil; "one hundred pounds shall be divided among you the hour I board 'the Marguerite,'" continued he, turning to his crew.

"Ay, ay, my lord," they answered; "we'll work with a will."

Low and gloomy clouds gathered themselves in large masses, rolling and unfolding under the very rays of the setting sun. A hollow wind seemed to sweep over the sea, whistling shrill as it caught the light spars of "the Ripple" in its grasp, or sent the crests of the waves in briny showers over the anxious watchers.

A deep and mighty spirit seemed moving the ocean, whose bosom swelled so high; the little, light vessel was now borne on some great billow, and again sunk deep in a valley of waters.

"I am glad I left my boys at home," said Basil to himself.

"God love my Millicent!" was Gerald's prayer.

CHAPTER L.

PHILIP LEIGH took Lotty to Paris at first. And if he had purposely wished to make the affectionate and anxious Beauvillians know that "their girl" was happy, he could not have taken a better course.

Lotty was delighted. The beauty of the public buildings, the fresh, clear air, free from all smoke, the clean and new appearance of every thing, charmed her correct eye and good taste.

With a mind so constituted, that she found food and amusement for it in the smallest daisy, the lightest cloud, the narrowest space; it was not to be wondered at that Lotty drank in largely, with keen enjoyment, the sights and sounds with which she was now surrounded.

Had Philip's mind been in a less morbid condition, it must have been both charmed and elevated by thus associating with one so fresh and intelligent.

The unerring judgment with which she fixed at once upon the most correct building, the finest pictures, and the most beautiful statues, while it riveted the chains of admiration Philip felt for her, awoke no happier or more genial mood in his breast.

She was not to be happy but through him; she was to see with his eyes, hear with his ears, speak with his mouth. And yet he acknowledged to himself that it was her free, independent mind; her noble, truthful heart; her frank, happy temper, that made her so adorable to him. And how was he to make two such incongruities meet?

He would try a new plan.

"Why do you go so often to see that one picture?" said he, one day, to Lotty, as he found her in her usual place before the "Assumption of the Virgin Mary."

"It does me good to look at that face, Philip," she answered.

"I do not see any thing very particular about it in point of beauty. The faces of the children seem to me more lovely."

"But it is the expression, Philip, so pure, so devoted, so self-forgotten. It is so like Margaret."

"Ha!" said Philip, "I thought you had a reason for such admiration of this picture. Lotty! we leave Paris to-morrow."

"Very well, Philip."

Once, when a younger man, Philip had resided for some months in an old château in the forest of Ardennes; partly that he might, unmolested, study the French language, and partly that he might have the relaxation of some species of sport. The château was old, gloomy, and damp, in the heart of the forest. A farmer and his wife, with one servant, lived in it when Philip was there. If the same people inhabited it now, Philip could have no reason to doubt that Lotty would find any society so congenial to her as his own. Surely, in lonely solitude, nothing could come between him and her love.

He took the château for the three autumn months; and Lotty went at once from the fair city of Paris, with its palaces, and countless luxuries, to a tumble-down, old château, that smelt of mouldy cheese, and fusty mice.

No one dwelt within three leagues of the place. So Philip set himself steadily to watch for a change in that cheerful spirit.

A week passed.

"O Philip!" said she at the end of it, "you must come with me to-day, that I may show you the most magnificent Spanish chestnut-tree I ever beheld. Bear and I discovered it this morning, and we gathered chestnuts by the thousand. Do you know, Philip, old Aimèe makes bread of these chestnuts. She is going to teach me to do it some day."

"I thought that sour old dame spoke to no one," said Philip.

"She is not at all sour, Philip; she is very kind to me. I have been helping every morning to milk those poor, miserable, old cows; and I have enjoyed giving an account of ours. Ah! Philip, she was so infinitely amusing in her wonder."

"How do you make her understand you? She has the most outrageous *patois* I ever heard."

"I put a great quantity of Gloucester dialect into my French, and we get on wonderfully."

They went to see the great chestnut-tree.

"What an age it must be, Philip; I should like to take some of the young ones, sprouting about here, home. I think an avenue of Spanish chestnuts would be beautiful. Don't you, Bear?"

Bear agreeing, they both set off for a race, and her sweet laughter rang through the forest. At the end of another week Lotty was very full of business.

"That old Gerard is getting in his harvest, and wants the girl, so I am going to cook the dinner and act maid; and you must not scold, Philip, or perhaps the new maid will turn sulky, and not wait upon you."

She looked so fresh and pretty, his eyes followed every movement, though he said nothing. Clearly there was no taming her this way. Hard as the trial was to him, and bitterly as he punished himself, he determined to plead a sudden recall home, and leave her there by herself.

They only received a post once a week. Upon the receipt of the next one he would act upon this thought. He did so.

"Then," said Lotty, "Bear, you and I must go and get the chestnuts up. Do you mind taking them home, Philip?"

"No, he did not care;" in fact, at that moment, all he cared for was one look of disturbance or disappointment in her eyes. There was none.

He went; and that her eyes looked wistfully after him he felt certain. The exquisite delight of this thought kept up his spirits for full ten days. Not that he went to England, or intended to do so — he was but at the post-town contiguous to the old château.

In about a fortnight he became painfully anxious to see that bright face again; not that he expected it to look bright — he hoped it would be pale and sad, and only brighten when it saw him. But it was rather too soon as yet; so he went to Paris, for a few days, to consult a doctor about his heart, which he again felt uncomfortable.

During that time he learned not only from the English papers, but from home, the sad history of Court Leigh.

His first thought was, how glad he felt that he had taken Lotty from home before Lady Leigh's illness. She would have thought him a brute to have refused her kind cares and consolations at such a time.

His second thought took the form of a species of pleasure, that Lady Leigh should be thus hurt in the tenderest point. He had long owed her a grudge for her insensibility to his attractions. Now he was revenged.

His third thought dwelt upon his cousin. If he had been a fool (which was all the blame he attached to such crimes), it was nothing to him, Philip Leigh. It only gave him a greater probability of succeeding to the title he had so long coveted.

So, with all the letters and papers in his pockets to show Lotty, he retraced his steps to the old chateau, the agitation of his heart increasing the nearer he approached.

A double dose of the soothing tincture prescribed by his Paris doctor was necessary to calm his agitation. As he drove into the old court, no one appeared to welcome him; he had half fondly fancied such might be the case. He left the carriage with his hand on his side. Though unlocked, the house was empty. No farmer, no Aimèe, no servants. It was well for his nerves that he recollected, probably at this time of the year they were all out in the fields, and it was clearly his own fault giving them no timely notice of his coming.

Bidding the driver put up his horses as best he could, and promising him some refreshment, he passed on to the rooms he inhabited with Lotty. All scrupulously neat and clean, but cold and bare; no fires, no sign of them, nothing lying about, as if she had been lately there. For a moment his heart stopped beating. Had she gone? Had the solitude proved too much for that happy congenial spirit, which loved to bask itself in the hearts of kindred and people? He lay still and quiet for a few moments to recover himself, and then passed on to her bed-room. He leaned for support against the door, as he saw a little dress hanging on the back of a chair, with many other signs of her presence; the windows wide open, letting in the cool autumn breeze, with the early dead leaves rustling in with it. Lotty herself spoke, in all the neat arrangements of the room. In a small antechamber beyond there were even later marks of her having been there.

A letter was on her desk, unsealed, directed to her brother Norman; some blocks of wood were lying about, with chips and shavings, two penknives, and a file; and on the table was a half-finished, but most spirited likeness of Bear, carved in wood. Rejoiced as he was to be certified that she must have been there that morning, he would have been glad to see disorder, the unmistakable mark of neglect and indifference.

She was not idle either. Philip gazed with admiration on various rough drawings, representing different things, and from which he now perceived carvings were being made in soft wood, in different stages of completion, but all beautiful and true to nature. His heart being at ease from its first fear, and thinking, from Lotty's habits, she was sure to be in the fields with the people of the house, he proceeded to ransack the cupboards for food, both for himself and the man.

Nothing could he find but part of a loaf of black barley bread.

There was nothing to do but to go in search of some one. He soon found the people, but Lotty was not with them — she had gone, as they supposed, to the great chestnut-tree with Bear. He took his way slowly to the place. As he neared it, he went with a lighter step — he wished to see her before she caught sight of him. His heart thrilled with a strange sensation, and he stopped to calm it. He heard her low, sweet voice, singing the soft murmuring song he had never heard from her since she had sat on the arm of her father's chair.

When he could look, the little fairy thing was on her knees piling up a fagot of sticks, which she broke and placed deftly on the heap before her. And as she sang, she heaped some dry leaves out of her lap on to the whole; then lighting the pile, she put stick after stick on to the burning mass, until she had a bright fire before her, and it crackled, blazed, and sputtered, to the sweet song ringing from her heart.

Presently the fire seemed in the proper state for her fancy, and she spread about the hot ashes, putting in handfuls of chestnuts. Then she called aloud, "Bear! Bear! where are you, idle fellow?" And shortly Bear made his appearance with a rabbit in his mouth.

"Now, Bear, give it to me. Bear is a gentleman — he does not eat raw meat like a wolf, but waits until Lotty cooks his dinner. Well, what is it, my Bear, what disturbs you? somebody coming? No one that will hurt us, I know. What, still uneasy; has Philip come? Well! then, let us welcome him." So she left her fire and occupation, and came to where Philip was standing.

"How do you do, Philip? how are all at home?"

He drew her towards him, with a strange, sad feeling in his heart, that expressed itself in his face.

"Are you ill, Philip?" And her eyes looked up anxiously into his.

"No, Lotty; I was afraid I might have found you but dull and melancholy, leaving you so long alone."

"Dull? O! no, Philip, do not think thus; we don't know what it is to be dull."

"But what are you doing here with that fire, and why do you permit Bear to destroy the game?"

"It is his dinner, Philip — he has nothing else to live upon."

"I always thought he had the same as you have."

"Yes, in general; but he cannot eat chestnuts."

"Child, do you mean that you dine on chestnuts? — is that your dinner preparing now?"

"Yes, Philip; you left us no money."

"My Lotty, my poor Lotty! — but why did you not order what you wanted? Would these rascally people not trust you?"

"O, yes, I might have had what I liked; but do not vex yourself, Philip; I never was better, and I have really not felt a single want."

"But why, why could you be so silly, Lotty? you knew it would make me very angry."

"I did not think you would ever know it, Philip. If you returned ——"

"If I returned, Lotty?"

"Yes, I did not know that you would; there was nothing that I knew of to make you remain with me. You seem to take no pleasure in my society."

He interrupted her with an exclamation. This to him who felt as if dead when away from her.

"Well, eat your dinner. I should like to see how you and Bear manage," he gasped out at last.

"Come, then, and lie down here. You see my chestnuts are just done, and I break them up into this pot of cream, for I earn this by milking the cows in the morning. Now taste, Philip; is it not good?"

He assented, at the same time adding, "But not for the only dinner one has."

"But do you know, Philip, people nowadays eat far too much. One thing is quite enough for dinner; and if you were accustomed to one thing, you would shortly be surprised at ever having given yourself up to such gluttony as two." And she laughed her pretty, hearty laugh, because, as she declared, Bear was looking so cross, that she was caring for Philip, and not him.

"I always tell Bear he is not to eat his dinner raw, but to bring it to me to be cooked, that he may show he is a gentleman born; and do you know, Philip, one day he brought me a young pig. I did not know what to do."

Thus, as she ate her chestnuts and cream, did she chatter in happy glee such as he had hardly ever seen before in her. Was it to mock him? No, for on arriving at home, and talking with old Aimèe, he soon discovered enough to know she had been neither dull nor moped.

"Ah!" said the old woman, in her patois, "she is a fairy, a child-angel; she is good, she is pretty, she is wise, she is not human, she is not of our natures. All things love her, all grows to her hand. She would not let me buy her food; no, she said, the great Father gave her her head and her two hands. Other people worked for food, why should not she? and she grows brighter and more lovely each day; but she will buy for others. She makes her fine wooden dogs, and her pretty wooden houses, and I must have one to sell, to buy me my warm jacket, and Gerard must have one to sell, to buy him a new blouse. And who is not better for the fairy child? And she reads the Holy Book, and no one can do ill when she is by. Babette is not heedless and pert, Gerard is good and kind, and I think to myself, 'Aimèe, let not the child-angel see you have cross words on your tongue.'"

So Philip had absented himself for nothing, nay, rather to find that she was more happy without than with him; but all the sorrow he wished her to have felt, all the grief and trouble he meant to find her in, now fell upon her. She was broken-hearted for her Margaret.

Never since the death of her father had he seen her so moved. And if he had not been jealous and angry, that all this sorrow was for Margaret, and not for him, he must have contrasted the fine, noble energy with which she vindicated Harold, with the cold, selfish thoughts that had filled his own heart.

She besought him to let her go to Margaret. "He did not see any need," he said, "in granting her petition. Margaret had sufficient people to console her, without Lotty."

CHAPTER LI.

FOURTEEN days and nights did the buoyant little "Ripple" contend with the boisterous elements. Fourteen days did Basil and Gerald see rise with hope, and fourteen nights close with despair. Not once had they caught a glimpse of "the Marguerite."

Their own peril had been great. Cruising as near the coast of Holland as they dared, they had been spectators of more than one vessel disappearing in those treacherous sands, without the power to assist. Nothing but the light draught of the "Ripple" saved them; now they were necessitated to turn homewards. They were already on short allowance, and had barely enough to last three days. Nothing was to be gained by cruising longer, at this period of the year; the best thing they could do was to return to England, for, if any intelligence was to be had, it would, of course, be known there first.

Reluctantly, but with speed, they returned. It was not until safe in Cowes harbor that their captain gave voice to his fears.

"I never thought to see Cowes again. If this had not been a wonderful little boat, we should none of us have seen this spot again."

"Have we been in such danger, then?"

"Never nearer our last end more than once, my Lord."

"And 'the Marguerite?'"

The captain shook his head.

"How, you do not think she has been in danger? Remember her size."

"I have been scanning the harbor, my Lord, the last hour, and I can see nothing like her."

"But did you expect her back in port?"

"Ay, my Lord! if it was but a pet that took Sir Harold off, he would have returned ere this, with such a parcel of ladies on board. Remember, it blew a gale every day we have been out."

"'Tis true, we have had shocking weather."

"I did not think to tell you my suspicions, my Lord, until I was sure she had not returned to harbor, but ——" He paused. "Do you remember the Thursday night when we were so nearly lost ourselves?"

"I do."

"And the vessel that burned the blue lights so long, ere she finally heeled over, and was swallowed up?"

"Yes, yes."

"You went below, my Lord, unable to bear the sight. I heard women's shrieks amid the gusts of the wind and the roar of waters; you remember, Mr. Herbert, we never sighted the ship well, and I told you then she was more like the vessel we wanted than any I had yet seen, as far as I could judge."

"Nay, nay, for Heaven's sake forbear! in mercy speak no more!"

"Well, well, if any of the party are at home, which they ought to be by now, or heard of, for few ladies would have staid out this fortnight, all is right."

With a dread fear knocking at their hearts, they hastened ashore. Not one of all the ill-fated crew of "the Marguerite" had been even heard of since they departed.

There were letters from Millicent, and Lady Katherine, with the joyful news that Margaret was out of danger, and had had a letter from her Harold, dated Jersey.

Though to Basil and Gerald this gave no great hope, for they knew it must have been written the first trip, yet it seemed to have had all the effect of a healing balm on the fair head so heavily tried. While the penitent and self-upbraiding Lady Katherine wrote imploring letters for pardon to Harold, and she besought Gerald's and Lord Erlscourt's kind offices to obtain it from her injured son.

They did not dare to write in answer. It was less pain to leave them still in ignorance, than to dash their confiding hopes with suspicion.

They returned to the "Ripple." The captain had not been idle either in his inquiries, and his face showed but too correctly how his fears predominated.

"You see, my Lord, everything tells against our wishes. She had but little coal on board, and it is the worst of those vessels, half one thing, and half another, in cases of emergency, sail and steam are both wanted; for she is but half-rigged, on account of relying on her screw. Thus, if she drifted on to the sands, her sails would be of little use to get a craft of that size off the current-way, and unless she could use her screw, her fate would be inevitable. A handy, sharp captain would burn everything he could lay hands on to keep her going, even if he gutted the ship; but I can learn no good tidings of the captain of 'the Marguerite.' If he is not a shore-going captain, he is even something worse. God might have been merciful and spared her; but all that Thursday night nothing could hinder me from thinking that the very vessel we were pursuing at the risk of our lives, was sinking, almost within hail, into these terrible quicksands."

"Dreadful! — this is too horrible to think of!" exclaimed Gerald.

"Something must be done," said Basil. "I cannot live on here with such a load on my heart, and do nothing. Advise us, captain."

"Advise, my Lord — what can I say? Time will only tell the tale."

"We must return, then, and visit those sand banks; a trace may be found, a something to show that we must hope no more."

"We might do that," mused the captain. "We must hire a strong steamer."

"Agreed," said Basil, eagerly; "do it to-day."

"And you, Gerald, will return home; one of us must be on the spot, if — if ——"

Uncontrollable emotion overcame them both.

By night-time Basil was gone in a stout steam-tug, accompanied by the captain; while, at the same time, Gerald took his mournful journey home.

It was well he had but Millicent to encounter at first. To her he told the history of their perilous and fruitless voyage; to her he whispered the direful suspicions of the fate of "the Marguerite."

"It will kill them! — it will kill them both!" cried the tender Millicent, wringing her hands. "O God, avert from my Margaret a blow so heavy! And Lady Katherine, Gerald! — when she knows it was her letter — when she feels it was her doing — ah, merciful Heaven, spare us! — spare us!"

It was fortunate that Margaret was still too ill to see Gerald; nevertheless, as another fortnight passed, and still no tidings, and Lady Katherine and Pru. detailed how ill was Gerald, how altered, and wretched, Margaret felt a shock. The suspicion grew strong — he knew more than she did.

As if by accident, she caused herself to be carried into the room, when he came to make his daily inquiries. One look was sufficient.

"You know more than you tell us, Gerald: speak!"

It was impossible to resist. Life and death seemed dependent on the command. He hesitated, faltered, and grew white.

"Tell her all," said Millicent; "it must be told soon."

To Margaret's well-disciplined mind there seemed at once a clew given her to a mystery she could not otherwise clear up. Her heart had mourned cruelly over the fact that Harold must have known how near her hour of danger was, and yet had suffered a month to elapse without making the slightest inquiry after her. With joyful alacrity she welcomed the dispersion of this most harrowing fact, and forgetting Lady Katherine's presence, said, quickly, "Ah, yes! my Harold was suspected, accused, upbraided: he will not return until fully acquitted."

"O Margaret, Margaret, upbraid me not!" cried the poor mother. "I have lost my son — my only son, Harold!"

"What said you in the letter, mother?" asked Margaret.

Between sobs and tears Lady Katherine gave them a description of its contents.

Margaret sighed deeply as the harsh and unnatural sentences smote on her ear. "No wonder — no wonder that he comes not, for he did not receive mine!"

"No," answered Gerald. "I left it at the post-office, Cowes. If I had done that at first, Harold would have received both together."

"It is fatality," said Margaret. But Lady Katherine's nerves gave way; she could bear up no longer against her painful thoughts; and falling into hysterics, had a practical illustration of the sort of demon that had possessed poor Pru. on her sister's wedding-day.

Another fortnight passed. Like the pale being of another world, Margaret moved among them.

One evening Millicent said to her husband, "A shadow has fallen on the window now for the third time. See! — it is Basil!"

Gerald sprung out; for a moment Basil turned away; then his face revealed the fatal truth; but he could not find voice to say, —

"It was even as our captain said; 'the Marguerite' perished on that Thursday night, within hail of us, and not a soul on board survived her."

Who was to tell the fond wife, the loving Margaret? They sat all three through the night, wondering how it was to be done, and, as the morning dawned, they wondered still.

"We must go to Rose Leigh first," was all that Millicent could advise. "We must not care for the shock it may be to Lady Katherine, for, by that means only, can we hope Margaret will exert herself."

"You are right, Milly," said her brother. "That sweet, gentle spirit will calm her own sorrow, not to add by a single pang to one deservedly afflicted."

They entered the drawing-room at Rose Leigh; Lady Katherine was moving restlessly about, as was her habit within the last few weeks. Basil laid down before her, without a word, a glove saturated with salt water, a neckerchief impregnated with sand, part of a coat with the seaweed yet on it.

"I found these," he said, slowly, "on a sand bank off the coast of Holland, with many other things; did they belong to your son or no?"

With a cry that pierced the air with its agony, Lady Katherine caught up the well-known neckerchief; one shriek followed another in quick succession, mixed with piteous cries for her son. A wild and frantic spirit seemed to possess her, and, alarmed for her life or reason, Basil was about to speak. But as he looked up, a vision at the window appalled him. Unconscious that she was entering at the window, as he placed the sad mementoes of her drowned Harold before his mother's eyes, he knew not that Margaret saw it all. Lady Katherine's eyes followed his.

"He is dead, drowned, and I murdered him! I, his mother, murdered my son — my only son! Away! — look not at me! — touch me not!"

The white, stricken vision came swiftly to the frantic mother, and put her arms round her.

"Mother," said the low, sad voice, "if our Harold is dead he is safe with God."

CHAPTER LIV.

After Philip's determination not to let Lotty go to Margaret, a change came over his wife. She neither sang nor laughed, and she never voluntarily spoke to him.

"No matter," thought he, "I will tame her yet."

When the three months were over, he settled that they should go from town to town, and place to place, until he could fix upon a convenient spot in which to winter.

The grief of Aimée, Gerard, and Babette was loud and shrill. The angel child was about to leave them; nothing would prosper with them again.

Lotty comforted the old woman as well as she could, and her last words were, "We hope to reach the same heaven, Aimée; we may meet there."

"God and the Holy Virgin grant it!" said Aimée; and for fear she should not be worthy to meet the child-angel in heaven, mother Aimée mended her ways and speech considerably, and grew a kind-hearted, respected old dame.

Philip, at last, settled that Homberg should be their winter residence. He had been there before, for a year or two, had indulged in some excitement at the gaming tables, and had made a few disreputable acquaintances.

It was here Lotty should undergo her last trial, as Philip thought. She always wrote once a week to her relations; Philip had at first remonstrated upon this, but she said quietly, "If I don't write, a tribe of Beauvillians will take flight after us."

He felt the truth of this. Once or twice he had the meanness to read her letters, especially that one he found open on her desk when he returned from his feigned journey to England. He was properly punished, whenever he did so, by finding his name not even mentioned in them. Nothing but happy, innocent details of her life; what she and Bear did and saw.

Philip knew Lotty did not like being shut up in a town, so he took a house in a dirty street; and knowing that she would not venture out after her early morning walk, he always left her as soon as she came in, to go to the gaming tables, from whence he returned at all hours.

Lotty never complained. She and Bear seemed to be leading very comfortable lives. Philip said he had lost a great deal of money, and could not afford this, that, and the other; so they did without, not he at least, for he had all the luxuries he required at the *cafés;* only Bear and Lotty were put on such short commons that Philip found out Lotty spent her hours in drawing, and disposed of them to get food.

O loving Beauvillians! if you had but seen your girl, all the milk of human kindness flowing so generously from your large hearts, would have turned at once into a lake of burning indignation.

One day at a gaming table Philip's ears were attracted by the conversation of a French count and a German baron.

"Always attended by a large bloodhound," were the words he heard.

"Yes," said the Baron, "and her eyes lustrous are as stars; but she is very *petite* — a child."

"I spoke to her," said the Count, "and as she answered politely to my question concerning the road, I thought to pursue my advantage; but when she found my purpose, those lustrous eyes flashed, and she said 'Bar,' and the great hound came, his bristles all erect, and his fangs exposed. *Ma foi!* it needed but that child's voice, and I should have been minced."

"Ha, ha!" said the Baron, "afraid of the hound; I should have kicked him, and sent him howling; but is she not a child?"

"No, no child; a queen could not have looked more stately."

"I shall meet her to-morrow," said the Baron; "her beauty is surprising — but such an hour! I must go straight from here to be early enough."

Philip went home boiling with rage. He poured out his anger and disgust to Lotty, demanding why she had not told him.

"I cannot lose my early walk, and if it is supposed that I live here with no protector but my dog, is that my fault, Philip?"

"It is your fault; you drive me from you because you will not love me as I wish."

"Do you try to make me love you, Philip?"

"If you do not love me," said he, evasively, "you shall fear me."

"Fear!" said Lotty, her slight figure drawn up, her lip curling in scorn.

"Do you dare me?" he said fiercely.

She did not answer.

"Do you mean to say I cannot make you fear me?"

"I fear but one thing in the world."

"And what is that?"

"That I may not do my duty."

He could not but believe her; truth spoke in every gesture. At last he said sullenly, "If you walk out between four and six in the public and most frequented walks, I will take care to be there also, either with you or near you."

"Thank you, Philip."

He meant but to try her still.

Attended by her dog, she went. Philip was there before her, talking loudly and gayly to a very handsome Frenchwoman. Lotty passed quietly on, walking from one shaded walk to the other, attracting every eye, but not seeming to care for it; Bear, with discreet tail and ears, walking in a stately manner by her.

After her walk, when they reached home, they had a long conference together, and mutually agreed that the change was very disagreeable.

"It is sad, Bear, that we are not still in the forest, that we may not run about and do as we like, without so many eyes upon us; still we are not so sad as Queen Margaret. Ah! if we were with her, Bear, we should not care for rude eyes and hard fare. We should think of nothing but her. At all events, Bear, you agree with me still; it's better to be poor Lotty and dull Bear than Carry or Flo. So we will write again to sweet Meg, and comfort ourselves."

Again Lotty and Bear went out to the public walks, as Philip had ordered, at the hour he appointed, and again he appeared with the handsome Frenchwoman.

Lotty and Bear to-day made the acquaintance of a good old bonne, and her merry children. Bear did a wonderful amount of tricks to amuse them.

So that on the third day they proceeded to the public walks in rather better spirits — they hoped to meet their friends again. The old bonne's face beamed with pleasure as she saw the little figure with the great Bear appear. She took her for a child, and became so familiar as to say, "Always, *mon enfant*, come and place yourself under my care — I will be your bonne."

So Lotty and Bear enjoyed themselves. Philip was invariably there; and though Lotty attracted great attention, nothing had occurred to call forth any interference on his part as her natural protector. Besides, since she had placed herself under the surveillance of the good bonne, many people imagined she was the proper charge of the worthy creature.

"One day," said the bonne to Lotty, "I overheard, *mon enfant*, those two talking, that lady and the English gentleman. The lady is going to speak to you the first opportunity, and make your acquaintance. *Ma chère*, you must not permit it; she is not for such as you to speak to. She is Madame La Luce, very wicked and bad, for all her handsome appearance. That young Englishman is infatuated; he will be ruined."

The good bonne little imagined she was speaking to the wife of the doomed Englishman.

After her warning, Lotty became aware that Philip was trying to meet her, in one of the walks by herself, for the purpose of speaking to her; Madame La Luce being with him.

She avoided the *rencontre* with such skill, that at last Philip either grew impatient, or the lady taunted him, for he advanced to Lotty alone one evening, when she was walking with the good bonne.

"Lotty, I wish you to come with me."

"For what purpose, Philip?"

"I wish to introduce you to a lady, a friend of mine. She is in the next walk."

"You must excuse me, I do not wish the introduction."

"I command it," said Philip, passionately.

"And I disobey," said Lotty.

She passed on with the old bonne, leaving him in a whirlwind of emotion.

Did she know whom Madame La Luce was? Could she be jealous? If so, his purpose was accomplished; his last trial successful. He trod on air at the thought.

"*Mon enfant*, the Englishman knows you," said the bonne.

"Yes," said Lotty.

"Your brother, *ma chère?*"

"No, my husband."

"*O, mon Dieu! O, misericorde! O, mon enfant! jamais. Helas! jamais. Jamais je ne l'aurai cru.* Ah! Mary, mother of God, this child, this *petite, charmante enfant! Ah! ma chère, mon ange, que je suis miserable!*"

Lotty tried to bring her old friend to some little reason; but as there was no possibility of getting her out of her state of surprise and consternation, she returned home.

Lotty had not been there long before the waiters from a restaurateur's came to the house, and prepared to lay dinner for three. In a little while a *fiacre* drove to the door, from whence Philip handed Madame La Luce.

Lotty was sitting in a sort of child's attitude in a large, old, carved chair, her curls in an unusually disordered state; but so picturesquely did they fall, that nothing could exceed the prettiness of the picture. She had been having a serious conversation with Bear, and perhaps, in the heat of the argument, if they had arrived at one, Lotty had resorted to the Beauvillian habit of running her fingers through her hair. Bear's fine head was resting on the arm of the chair, and his loving eyes were saying all sorts of things to his little mistress. The door opened, and Philip led in Madame La Luce.

"Lotty, I wish to introduce you to Madame La Luce. Madame, my wife, Mrs. Leigh."

Lotty looked up, and Madame made an elaborate courtesy. She was about to speak, when Philip said quickly,—

"Lotty, do you not hear?—greet your visitor; she dines with us to-day."

Lotty rose from the chair, and, without taking the smallest notice of either of them, called to Bear, and left the room with him.

Philip looked in her face as she passed. There was no look of jealous anger, no passion, no feeling—nothing but an expression of calm contempt.

"Ha! ha!" cried Madame La Luce, with the hissing tone of a woman in a rage; "is this your baby wife? *hein;* but we are the tragedy queen! Small indeed! but a soul, ha! ha! a soul so large, Monsieur Philip, so big, you cannot have control of that soul. He have baby wife, but she cry loudest."

Madame La Luce would have continued darting forth her fiery stings at Philip, had she not seen that he was white with passion.

"I will make her return," he said; "remain, Madame — she shall return and apologize."

As Philip bounded up the stairs to his wife's room, he had no feeling in his heart but that she should obey him. As he entered the room, Lotty was putting on her walking-dress.

"Where are you going?"

"Away," said Lotty.

"You shall not!" and he grasped her arm.

"Bear!" said Lotty. The noble hound sprung to her side; and as Philip relaxed his hold, he knew by the fiery eyes and swift, brushing tail, Bear was in no mood to be trifled with.

"How can you be so foolish, Lotty? I bring a lady to make your acquaintance, and you conduct yourself in this manner!"

"She is not the person a husband usually introduces to a wife."

"You are jealous, Lotty."

Ah! if she would but allow it, he would lay himself at her feet for forgiveness, and be her slave forever.

She did not answer; she only looked at him. It was enough: never did look express such contempt at the supposition.

"How know you she is the person you mean?"

"If you can deny it, I am willing to believe you."

He did not dare to do so; she looked so pure and childlike in her reproving way.

"Come, Lotty, she shall go if you do not like her; forget this, and I will send her away."

"A Beauvilliers will submit to everything but insult. You have insulted me, both as a wife and a woman. I have borne everything else, and done my duty to you as fully as you permitted me. Now I am free. Farewell, Philip Leigh! I go to my own people. Once more I am Charlotte Beauvilliers."

She did not mean to triumph; she did not intend to hurt his feelings; but there was such an unconscious delight as she spoke of going to her people, such an air of charmed freedom as she uttered her maiden name, that Philip Leigh fell to the ground, smitten, crushed, with the conviction in his heart she was lost to him forever — and that it was the work of his own hands.

She glanced at him as he lay gasping on the floor.

"Bear, be good — Philip is ill."

Bear laid down by Philip's side on the floor, his watchful, excited air giving place to a calm, steadfast gaze on Lotty. She raised Philip's head, his eyes were closed; she could see the violent beatings of his heart, as it heaved the coat up and down. His struggles for breath were fearful.

"Ring the bell, Bear."

The obedient dog obeyed.

"Go for a doctor — Mr. Leigh is very ill," she said, as the servant answered.

Madame La Luce, wondering, it is supposed, at the commotion up stairs, or at Mr. Leigh's absence, now made her appearance at the door, asking, in her sharp, broken English, —

"What is de matter?"

"Mr. Leigh is ill, Madame," said Lotty, calmly.

"*O, mon Dieu, il est mort!*" said she, screaming.

"Pray, Madame, calm yourself — your cries make him worse."

With a mighty gasp, that made Philip's words fall from his mouth with startling distinctness, he said, "Go, woman!"

"You go, my dear. I hold Mr. Leigh; he have my care."

"He meant you, Madame," said Lotty, calmly.

"*Mon Dieu!* no, he adore me; he wish me by his side; he old bon friend."

Here Philip's efforts to speak became agonizing.

"Bear," said Lotty, "turn her out."

Nothing loth, Bear proceeded to perform his orders with so much good will and alacrity, that Madame fled shrieking down the stairs, and flying into the drawing-room, sank into the first chair that came to hand. Bear followed; his low, sharp growls and snapping jaws sounded and looked awful. But to those who knew him, there was a good-humored sort of chuckle in his eyes, that plainly showed he meant to be quite the gentleman in all he did, and that he was enjoying the fun greatly.

He walked with stately and solemn step into the drawing-room after Madame, and rearing his huge proportions against the door, he shut it like any other gentleman. Then, choosing a convenient spot before the door, he laid himself down, in a calm sort of contemptuous mood, and Madame saw she was a prisoner.

Though she might have done deeds worthy of a prison, it never entered into her contemplations that her gaolor would present to her the appearance of the present one. The thought of hysterics had occurred to her, but possibly her strange keeper might take measures to bring her round, never mentioned in the annals of physic, which would prove something so frightfully out of the common as to be her death.

So she sat trembling in her chair, vowing and protesting to herself that her old admirer, who adored her, should adore at a distance, for never again would she encounter the glance of the child-wife's eyes, or the jaws of her brute, "*si effroyable*," if once she escaped from the contiguity of either. Never was woman in such a predicament; unable to shriek, to speak, to scold, not daring to move, she sat through what she thought a lifetime of horrors. Once, and once only, with stealthy, slow movement, did she put out her hand to reach the bell-rope.

Just as she thought she grasped it, a short, sharp growl of intense anger made her spring out of her chair with fright, and fall into it again with fear. She could just see Bear, and after this mark of his qualities as a gaoler, he was quietly licking his paws. Lotty would have said he was trying to hide a smirk of gratified irony, that came over his grim countenance; but Madame saw nothing but "*une bête effroyable.*"

Various noises were heard up stairs, running, calling, and every sign of a dark and momentous time.

At the end of an hour all was quiet, and Bear seemed to know that something pleasant was coming, for he raised himself, his huge tail went to and fro, making a breeze quite refreshing to the half-sick Madame. His eyes assumed a loving, fond look, and as the door opened he made way.

"Have you behaved like a gentleman, Bear?" said the young girl, as she entered.

Bear rose up to his full height, and putting a paw on each shoulder, looked an unmistakable "yes" into Lotty's eyes. Madame shrieked, Lotty kissed him between the eyes and said, "Good Bear!" Then with a manner so dignified and courteous that Madame La Luce's bold eyes drooped before hers, she said, "Mr. Leigh is better, Madame—would you like a *fiacre?*"

"I wish to see him," said Madame La Luce, with poor effrontery.

"The doctor is there, Madame, and he is shortly coming here to write a prescription."

The fact that this girl, in her woman's delicacy, should try to spare Madame La Luce the shame of being found in a ma ried man's house, awoke no corresponding feeling in that hardened breast.

It was nothing to her — she had no shame left; she would brave it out, if only to hurt the English wife's feeling.

"I shall stay to see M., the doctor, to hear his opinion."

"As you please, Madame; come Bear." And they left the room without further notice of Madame. She was rejoiced at the absence of her strange gaoler, but she wished she had it in her power to daunt that small, proud girl, if but for a moment. It required all the effrontery and boldness she possessed to face the doctor's astonishment when he saw her.

He was a Scotchman, but had been settled in Homberg many years. The servant had called him instead of a German doctor, thinking the lodgers would prefer their own countryman, especially the little young wife, who had made her way into their hearts by many acts such as Lotty was well versed in.

Mr. Laird knew Madame La Luce well by sight and reputation.

"You here, Madame?"

"Yes, Monsieur; how is your patient?"

"Who is that young girl up stairs, then?"

"I know not, Monsieur."

"Ay, I kenned she was owre young for his wife," said the doctor, musingly."

"How is M. Leigh?"

"Vara ill, Madame, and no fit for company like yours. Tak my advice, and gang yer ways."

"I am going, *M. le Docteur!* I but wait to hear of my old friend, M. Leigh — he adore me."

"He'll no adore ye long then. If the Lord sends nae better symptoms, he'll no leeve twelve hours."

"*O, mon Dieu! pauvre* M. Leigh! I go, I fly — make my compliments to M. Leigh. *La mort! O, c'est affreuse.*"

CHAPTER LIII.

When Mr. Laird reached his own house, late at night, after seeing his patient in a calm sleep, and the child, as he called her, sitting by his side, with an old woman in the room, whom he had sent for to assist, he fell into a deep fit of musing.

"My word, Alick, but ye might awa to bed, if ye're ganging to sit mump like that."

Thus said Mrs. Laird, who was also Scotch, and not of a kindly temper, for she mourned over her banishment from the land of cakes and heather.

"Hoot, woman! dinna fash. I hae got a new patient."

"Man or woman, Alick?"

"A young man, and my heart is wae about him — I think he'll die; and he is such a fine, grand, weel-favored chiel."

"And what's his ill, Alick?"

"Heart complaint, Janet."

"Ay, me, what a mony folks dee of that the noo, Alick! In my young days, heart complaint was joost a fit o' luve."

"Science is mair skilfu' noo, Janet, and kens mony things that were aye hidden afore."

"Is he weel to do, Alick?"

"There seemed no lack, Janet; for when I ca'ed for what I wanted, it aye cam to my hond."

Mr. Laird was very deep; he knew poverty was a great sin in Janet's eyes; and as he was plotting a scheme in his own mind, which, without her consent, he knew could not be done, he was calling up all his craftiness to his aid.

"And so you think he'll dee, Alick?"

"No that, Janet, if I had him under my ain e'e, in the house here — he has nane to look after him."

"And div ye think I'se gwan to have a strange mon in my house?" said Mrs. Laird, wrathfully, and beginning to see the Doctor's drift.

"Then the puir, bonny lad must joost dee. Madame La Luce must nurse him."

"Wha?" said Mrs. Laird, panic-struck.

"Did no I tell ye I fund that woman i' the house?"

"Deed o' goodness, Alick! gang yer ways in the morn, and fetch him straight here. I wadna be doing my duty as a countrywoman, did I leeve the bonny lad in her clutches."

"He is no to say a lad," said Mr. Laird.

But Mrs. Laird was so taken up with her own ideas, that she did not heed him. She had brought out with her from her native land a great deal of the old Puritan blood and feelings, for which that land is famous. The unrighteous and ungodly proceedings of "foreign pairts," as she termed it, and the peculiarly "awfu'" state of Homberg in particular, had done much to increase her little acerbities. In railing at them, she had adopted a habit of always railing, because her decorous mind and strict ways were scarcely ever without an affront on them.

Madame La Luce, in particular, was a never-failing source of righteous wrath; and when everything went well in the house, — Mr. Laird in high favor, the maids all doing their duty, — that abhorred and odious name never failed to upset the whole household, putting Mrs. Laird into a week's ill-humor.

"The hussie! the ne'er-do-weel! — ye think ye'll hae yer ain way. Eh, Doctor, but ye mun be up in the morn, and get him awa', puir misguided lad!" exclaimed she, at last, having indulged in various other remarks that would not look well in print, though, no doubt, strictly true.

"There is a bit, lass, too," began Mr. Laird.

"Hoot, man! de ye think I can fash mysel' wi' ony more o' your patients?"

"She is nae patient, Janet. I am thinking she'll be sister to you."

"I am sure there is naebody wha does their duty more according to the blessed commandments nor me; but as for taking in a' your fancies, Doctor, I wunna!"

"Then I'll just gie this up, Janet! and I wadna hae mentioned it till ye, but I feared Madame La Luce might just get haud of the young lassie; and then, puir bairn ——"

"Gang yer ways, Doctor, and fetch 'em both. I'll get the blue room ready for the lad, and the lass shall aye sleep in the sma' chamber within my ain. I warrant nae madames will get at her there."

Dr. Laird having gained his ends, thought it prudent to say nothing about the dog. As Madame La Luce could not contaminate him, there was no ruse by which he could obtain a consent for his admittance. He was, in reality, very anxious to have his new patient immediately under his own eye, not only because he feared that the case was a very bad one, but, being in lodgings, Madame La Luce might have constant admittance, and keep his patient in a state of agitation that would go far to retard his cure; for he had seen quite enough to know that he was violently agitated at the bare mention of her name. Besides, his kind heart felt for the little, lonely child, who had showed such judgment and tact in all she had done to assist his professional labors, and whose slight touch and gentle words seemed to be like balm to his patient. Also, the study of a heart-disease was a peculiar hobby of the good doctor's; therefore, it was not to be wondered at that he fell into a brown study in trying how he could beguile Mrs. Laird into his wishes, and went to bed very well satisfied that he had succeeded.

On the morrow Philip was removed into the doctor's house, with every care and precaution. To do Mrs. Laird justice, when she made up her mind to a thing, she entered into every detail of it, as if the original idea was her own, and had for some time been her sole wish.

She had routed up the good doctor at peep of day; she had cleaned, dusted, and tidied the blue room; she had prepared several little savory messes; she received Philip as her own son, and, taking forcible possession of him, she had him placed between the snow-white homespun linen sheets, and surrounded him with everything fresh and clean.

She viewed, with great satisfaction, his pale, white face assume a look of pleasure at the change from the dismal lodging to the cheerful, sunny chamber; then, seeing him gaze anxiously around, she said, —

"What more want ye?"

"Lotty," said Philip, feebly.

"Here, Philip," said a voice outside; and a little fairy child came and sat at the foot of the bed.

Before Mrs. Laird had time to recover her astonishment, a great dog followed, and lay at her feet.

In her anxiety about Philip, Mrs. Laird had forgotten the existence of the "little lass;" but when the hound followed and laid himself down as if he were perfectly at home, her wrath overflowed.

"And whatten a beast do you ca' that?" she said, with a vinegar aspect, to Lotty.

"He is a Scotch bloodhound, ma'am," she answered.

"Scotch or not, div ye think I'll allow such a beastie as that in my best chamber?"

"Go down, Bear, and lay by the front door until I come," said Lotty.

Bear got up, and with a meek look of supplication addressed to Mrs. Laird, he slowly departed, with his tail in a dejected and forlorn droop.

Mrs. Laird looked astonished, but said nothing. She followed Bear out, and having apparently watched him, came back with a red face.

"What sort of a dog is you, that he kens a' ye say, like ony Christian?" said she, to Lotty.

"He is a very good, sensible dog, ma'am. I will take care he shall give no trouble, if you will let him remain."

"I maun judge for mysel' first, afore I mak rash promises."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Weel, noo, if you'll promise to be good and quiet, ye may stop with your brither a bit, while I step for a sup broth."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"What's the matter wi' you, my man?" said Mrs. Laird, seeing a cloud passing over Philip's face.

"She is my wife," said Philip.

"The Lord be gude to us all! — he is raving."

"No, ma'am," said Lotty. "I am eighteen years old nearly."

"O doctor, doctor! — come yer ways; here's a tale to tell!" and Mrs. Laird hurried out.

CHAPTER LIV.

"Do you feel more easy, Philip?" said Lotty, after Mrs. Laird's abrupt departure.

"Yes, Lotty; this room is pleasant."

"I must make some arrangements about our lodging and board, Philip; you would not like to be here on charity."

"No, no, of course not. You will find as much money as you want in my writing-case."

"I may use it all, then?"

"Yes, yes, use what you like, take what you like; we can pay liberally, I have enough. But, Lotty, do not leave me."

"I shall not while you are ill, Philip."

"Thank you."

"Shall I read to you, Philip?"

"Yes; but sit where you are."

Lotty did not read long; for Mrs. Laird, having recovered her wits, now brought in the "sup broth."

While administering it she proceeded to unburden her mind of various matters, the foremost of which was the horror and shock she felt, that with a wife (though but a child) he had suffered himself to get entangled with Madame La Luce.

Philip's face grew flushed, and the bed-clothes began to heave.

"Ma'am," said Lotty, "he does not like Madame La Luce any more than you do."

"At no hand say her name, bairn; it's no fit for the like o' you."

"But you agitate Mr. Leigh, ma'am, and it was owing to her he had these spasms."

"O, ay! and was that it? Weel, I'll say nae mair. If it wasna his fault, it's no me as will say ane word more abune the matter. I see the hail thing the noo, and I dinna think it strange that a madame like that should hae been tuke wi' his bonny luiks. Ech! puir bairns, ye hae had a grand miss o' ill, and its weel ye had the good speerit, my man, to thraw Satan behind ye."

"Shall I give him the broth, ma'am?" said Lotty; "you have so much to do."

"Weel, mind now ye dinna give it owre hot. It's nae mair nor right that ye should learn yer duty as a wife."

And Mrs. Laird departed, without seeing that whatever good her broth might have done, her words were stings to Philip.

"Lotty, Lotty, do you forgive me?"

"Yes, Philip."

"Your simple yes is to me what a solemn oath would be from another. I may feel it so, may I not, Lotty?"

"Yes, indeed, Philip," said Lotty, touched with his weak and faltering voice.

"I should like to know what feeling prompts you, Lotty, to hide what you might so truly expose to your own honor and credit?"

"As I hope for mercy myself, Philip, so would I give it others."

"Mercy!" said Philip, echoing her word; "why should you require mercy?"

"We are all sinners before God, Philip, and all have need of mercy."

"And do you believe so truly in a God, Lotty?"

"The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God,'" she answered, with solemn emphasis.

Philip colored, and remained silent for some time.

"Has the doctor said anything to you, Lotty, about my illness? Does he think it will be long before I am better?"

"I do not know, Philip."

"I should like to speak to him when he has time," said Philip.

"Very well, Philip; but now pray try to sleep; the doctor said you were to keep quiet."

"Will you remain where you are?"

"Yes, Philip."

He shut his eyes, and she sat in her child's attitude at the bottom of the bed, reading. And so they remained for an hour, but she knew he did not sleep.

At the end of that time Mrs. Laird entered.

"Weel, bairn, ye hae been vara quiet. I hae been to the door, peeping through yon chink, and aye seen ye at yer post. So when ye get weel, Mr. Leigh, ye'll have to remember she did her best, though she is sae young. But now, bairn, gang ye to the big hound; he joost breaks my heart, ganging by the door-mat; he looks that wistful at me. His een say as well as ony Christian, 'Hoo long do ye mean to keep me biding here?' And he'll no stir for ony of us."

"May I bring him up here, ma'am?" said Lotty.

"Nae, bairn, gang yer ways first oot o' the door, and get a bit fresh air, with the big doggie, and then may be I'll see about letting him go ben the house."

"Shall you want me, Philip?"

"I want you always, Lotty; but go."

"O, ay, gang awa'; ye wadna, Mr. Leigh, keep a young thing like thon fra the Lord's air. She'll joost gang into the garden, and I'll be sitting in thon chair watching her, to see she gets into nae mischief."

"Can I see her?" said Philip, eagerly.

"No, dinna you stir; I'll tell ye a' the news as I sit. Ech! but, mon, I dinna understand ye. Hardly letting the bairn out o' your sight, and then letting that hussie have speech o' her."

"What is she doing now, Mrs. Laird?"

"Why, she is rinning here, there, and everywhere, and the big doggie is after her, and they are like twa bairns at play. Ay! but it's wonderfu', how he threeps after that bit thing. Has she nae mither, that she gaed that young lass marry you, Mr. Leigh?"

"No, she had no mother."

"I thought so! and ye being, nae doubt, knowledgable, did ye think it wad be a guid purpose o' marriage, to tie that child down in her early years? Ye couldna have expected her to be a woman of wife-like pairts."

The hot tears burst from Philip's eyes; they had been gathering long, and Mrs. Laird was silent and watchful in her efforts to calm his agitation.

Though she had many a secret misgiving as to the cause of this bitter weeping on the part of a man who looked as if he was one of Nature's finest works, she did not like to ask him more questions; but settled in her own mind she would give the thoughtless child-wife many a lecture on the duty of comporting herself discreetly. For such tears could only have been extorted by some heavy domestic disappointment.

In the evening the doctor was closeted long with his patient, and Mrs. Laird took the opportunity of giving her first lecture to Lotty, whom Philip had desired not to be present.

"I am thinking, my bairn, if ye paid half as much attention to Mr. Leigh as ye do to yer dog, he wad be better content."

"Did he say so ma'am?" asked Lotty, quickly.

"Nae, he said nothing, but he wept salt tears, and nae man does that wi'out heart's sorrow."

Mrs. Laird perceived, with much shock, that Lotty seemed pleased to hear her husband had been weeping.

"Nay, ma'am," said she, in answer to her reproof, "I did not mean to be heartless, but people do not weep unless their hearts are soft and tender."

"But, bairn, if you put on him owre much, nae wonder ye make his heart hard."

"I will try not to put on him then, ma'am," said Lotty.

"That's my gude bairn. May the Lord but please to grant him his health, and ye will turn out a grand wife yet. But hae ye nae relations, child?"

"Yes, ma'am, of all kinds."

"And has he?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And how cum ye to this heathenish place, no one near ye, and no servants?"

"Philip wished it, ma'am."

"And are ye weel off? no that the doctor or me is to say money lovers, and I hae taken ye into my house, and that is just next to taking ye into my heart, and if Philip, as ye call him, but mends, that's a' the recompense Janet Laird wants."

"Philip told me, ma'am, to give you this money; and as we are not poor, he trusts that you will allow us to pay for everything, the same as if you had kindly taken us in as lodgers. But you must suffer me to say, that no money, nothing we can give, will repay you, in our thoughts, for this truly Samaritan kindness."

"Bairn, bairn, dinna talk like that! we are sair wearied living in this evil place, and that makes one fashious; but I had a lad brither, just like your Philip, and my heart warms to him."

"You are very kind, ma'am, and I thank you also for your goodness to Bear, for — for ——" Here Lotty's voice faltered.

"Say nae mair; the doggie is unco queer, and I think not quite canny, but he is vara welcome, as long as he is discreet. But deed o' goodness, bairn! div ye ken how much money is here?"

"Yes, ma'am, nearly two hundred pounds of English money, and forty-eight pounds in foreign money, and you can have as much more when you wish it."

"Weel, I'll tak care on it then," said Mrs. Laird, with a sigh.

"Why do you sigh, ma'am?"

"If we had the half o' that, every year, I wad be back in our ain country."

"This is yours, at all events, ma'am," said Lotty.

"Hoot, bairn! more than twa hundred pounds! It's little ye ken about money; we'll tak what's fitting, just to mak ye feel at hame, but na mair, I can certify."

CHAPTER LV.

The doctor's face was grave and sad as he left Philip's room.

"Eh, doctor! but ye dunna think he'll die?"

He shook his head.

"Have you told him?" said Lotty, anxiously looking up into his face.

"I was feared it might hurt him," said the doctor.

"O, sir, ought he, should he, be permitted to die unprepared? Will you kindly think of this?"

As she spoke, Bear came into the room, and putting up his paw, tapped her on the arm.

"Philip calls, sir; but if there is no hope, O! hide it not, for the love of God." And she left the room.

"Deed, Alick, she is no canny, heartless bairn, talking in that way, and joost hearing she may lose her fine, winsome husband. And the hound —— Deed, if they gae on this queer way, I'll be demented. And she so sweet spoken too. You may depend on it, Alick, she has broke his heart with coldness."

"But aye body speaks well on her, Janet, and the auld nurse said she had had naething to do last night. The young leddy was up at the first word."

"I dinna ken what to mak o' her, Alick, for old Madame Wegel's bonne has been here a crying after her. But I'll think nae mair; they must gang their ain ways, if they winna seek counsel o' me. But div ye think he'll dee, Alick?"

"Naething but a miracle will save him, Janet."

"I'll just gang to the chink o' the door, may be he's axing her, and she'll just flit him aff, if she spaks out to him." And Mrs. Laird departed to listen, so that she might make amends for any heartlessness on the part of the little wife; but to say the truth, she was laboring under an ungovernable fit of curiosity.

"Lotty, did the doctor tell you nothing about my illness?"

"I had not time to hear more, Philip, than that his opinion was unfavorable."

"Then you will triumph, Lotty. Death will free you forever from your chain."

"Nay, Philip, talk not so. Do you think me so base in heart and feeling as to rejoice in the prospect of your death?"

"Why should you be different from the rest of the world? You hate me, and you will be rid of me."

"I do not hate you, Philip, and never did."

"Ah, Lotty, if I could but think that."

"I could not have married you, Philip, had I not liked you, whatever my father's commands had been; and you were fast gaining my grateful affections, by your forbearance at that time. I wished to love you, Philip. I tried to do so, not only because of his wishes, but the void in my heart at his loss was so aching. But —— "

"But what, Lotty? Go on, go on; if I had only known that before."

"You did, Philip. I told you. Do you not remember my warning you, that my love was not to be forced, only gained?"

"I remember that conversation well. I have pondered over it often. I determined to make you love me my own way."

"Yes, Philip."

"And, Lotty, did you refuse me your affection, because in my man's pride I would take no advice how to win it?"

"No, Philip, that you know is not the case. I love what is good, great, generous, and frank. Did you act thus towards me?"

"I loved but you, Lotty."

"And yourself, Philip."

"Then you mean to insinuate I have wrecked my own happiness."

"I do not insinuate, Philip. What I said so soon after our marriage, I say now. My love was to be won. I pointed out to you the way, which I would not have done to other than my husband. You took the opposite path."

"Whatever path I took, it seems that I, with a love in my heart not equalled by mortal man, am doomed, — doomed to an early death, — and you —— "

"Will pray that you may live, Philip," interrupted Lotty, solemnly.

"Ah," said Philip, eagerly, "is that true? Say it again, my wife."

"O, Philip, it is true that your life is in danger! Can you think of meeting your God, unprepared, unrepentant?"

"Is that the reason why you would pray for my recovery?"

"Yes, Philip."

"And would you rather that I should live, live, Lotty, to be what I have been to you, perhaps worse, if that can be, than die, as you say, 'unprepared to meet your God'?"

"Yes, Philip."

"Come here, and look at me. Ah, matchless eyes in beauty and color, but glorious in their truth and clearness, look full at me! Could you live on through this long life, separated from all you love, subjected to every trial and indignity, that you so well know can be inflicted upon you, for the hope that you might save a lost soul?"

"Yes, Philip."

"Then your God shall be mine; teach me to pray to him that, whether I live or die, you may have the reward you merit. Lotty, you have conquered."

"Nay, Philip, it was not I who entered the lists; it was one Philip against another. You have conquered yourself; but your heart beats. If you love Lotty, as you say you do, you will calm yourself at present, and rest."

"If I love Lotty?" murmured Philip. "I thought I did; but I loved my own mad will better. Will you read to me—read the Bible, read that one verse again,—'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God'?"

She placed herself before him, and a lofty, pure expression came over the lovely child-face, as she opened the Holy Book to teach the worldly-wise man.

With unerring judgment she turned from one passage to another. In the glowing language of Isaiah, the attributes of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Comforter, were shown to him. Then the fallen, abject state of man. And with voice that thrilled him with its earnestness, she poured forth the ever-living words of David, as he bared his heart, and the heart of every man, before God.

"Ah! Lotty, how true, how just. Is it you that speak to me in such language, or is it meant for me? Surely the name of Philip Leigh must be written there. Say it aloud—nay, spare me nothing, for that was, that must have been written solely for me."

"Nay, Philip, be calm. Recollect how necessary it is that you refrain from all excitement. Try and sleep now; to-morrow I will read again."

"How do you pray, Lotty? I know you pray every night and morning. I should like to hear you."

Lotty knelt down, and repeated the simple form of prayer with which she concluded each day. It was still much in the same form as when a child at school she used it, and its touching simplicity went through to Philip's heart. She paused a moment, and then whisperingly said his name, with a petition that God would open his eyes, and unseal his heart. It was a prayer he felt she must have repeated daily, and then with solemn earnestness she said the Lord's prayer. He repeated it after her.

"You always say that?" he whispered.

"Always," she answered.

"I thank God for it!" and he fell quietly asleep.

When Lotty left him for a short time, to go to Mrs. Laird, she found that old lady weeping.

"My bairn," she said, "I hae been at the chink in the door, and though I couldna hear much, I saw ye open the Holy Book, and I hope God will bless yer labors. I took ye for ane o' a hard heart, but somehoo ye hae mair thought than I kenned, and it wad be a burning sin did that fine laddie die with his sins nae forgiven."

"You will help me then, ma'am," said Lotty, taking her hand and kissing it.

"Bless the bonnie bairn!" said Mrs. Laird, folding her in her strong embrace, "I am ready to die for ye baith; and hoo it comes about I canna rightly say, for I kenned naething about either on you yestermorn."

"It shows, ma'am, how kind your heart is," said Lotty.

"Weel noo, we maun all gang to bed; it has been a day of wonders, and nae mortal can tell what new thing may hap on the morrow."

CHAPTER LVI.

In the night Philip had so severe a return of the spasms, that for several days he lay faint and exhausted, with the damp and the hue of death on his face, and scarcely any perceptible life in him.

Mrs. Laird had no reason to doubt "the bairn's" care for him. It seemed that Philip was sufficiently conscious to refuse all food but what her hand presented, hear no voice save hers, while the good doctor would say, —

"That's a wonderful young thing, that bairn wife, she forgets naething; and yet I dinna think she luves her husband as he does her."

"That's what's sending me joost crackit, Alick; such a bonnie fine lad, too, and when I get fashed wi' her steady, cauld ways, wi' nae heart in them, she luiks at me with them stars o' eyes, and I wad joost think her a bit angel, and could love the ground she stands on. And that big doggie, they're a pair on 'em. He is a lying at this minute on ma best parlor door mat, and, wad ye believe it, I tak it up stairs mysel, joost for him, for as he wadna leave the bairn, I didna think I could sleep weel if he hadna a saft bed too."

"Ech! Janet, ye had always the kind heart."

"And have ye tell't the lad Philip he canna mend?" said she.

"Ay, Janet, when the spasms was bad, he luiks at me and said, 'Is this death?' and I answered, 'The Lord so wills it.' Then the bairn wife stoopit down, and kissed him on the cheek, and he lookit awfu' at her, and said, 'Do ye this for the first time, because you will soon be free?' 'No, Philip,' said she, 'from sorrow and pity.' Then went he aff again, worse nor ever, and I didna think, Janet, he would hae lived till morn."

"Ay! mon, they are past my kenning, wi' their odd ways, as man and wife. First time, indeed! I dinna think I was ever but a discreet, prudent body, but I gav you a wife's kiss on the asking, Alick."

"She is sae young, Janet, and may be they have nae been lang married; I wonder has she written hame. It is time his friends should know, though it may be weeks yet afore the end."

When Philip had so far recovered as to talk and sit up for a few hours of the day, Lotty perceived that a gloomy spirit was in possession of his mind. She had not expected that he would always be in the soft and gentle mood that he was before the last seizure, so her gentle anxiety was nothing daunted.

Mrs. Laird was sitting at the window, in his room, while Lotty was taking her usual run in the garden with Bear.

"Do you see her, Mrs. Laird?" said Philip.

"Yes, she is ganging slowly down the broad path, and the big doggie is sorrowful by her side, and he has getten her little wee hand in his mou."

"Have they had no race together? has she not played with him as usual?"

"Noo, they are joost down-casted, baith on 'em," said Mrs. Laird; "though she is no wife-like in her ways, she has aye a warm heart, Mr. Leigh."

This was a feeler on the part of Mrs. Laird to extract something from Philip, who, however, made no reply.

"She was married owre young, Mr. Leigh, and I dinna think ye kenned how to beguile her into wife's ways."

"Trying to do so has brought me to this pass," he said gloomily, as if to himself.

"I doubt she hasna been canny with him," said Mrs. Laird to herself; "men are sae queer, thinking they are lords of creation, and never deeving there must be leddies too."

"What is she doing now?" said Philip again.

"She's drooping still mair, and the hound's tail sweeps the ground."

"Then you think she is in sorrow?" said Philip, eagerly.

"It looks vara like it, and to an auld body like me, I dinna luve to see young things greet. Sae, Mr. Leigh, if ye hae ony thing on your mind, atween her and you, get it settled sune; ye wadna like to die, and leave her so young wi' a canker in her heart."

"That would more surely be the case if I lived, Mrs. Laird," said Philip, bitterly.

"The rights between you I canna tell, as ye'll no seek counsel of ane wha is willing to gie it. But ony way, my mon, dinna gang to meet your Maker wi' an unrepented sin on your heart."

Philip was silent, but his eyes were fixed on the window, as if he tried to catch a glimpse of the garden.

"She faulds her hands and she luiks up to Heaven; maybe she is sending up a prayer to Heaven for ye, Mr. Leigh," said Mrs. Laird, who, mindful of her promise to Lotty, was endeavoring to fulfil it.

"And do you think there is a being who hears such prayers?" he answered.

"Ech! laddie, speak not so awfu' like. Div ye think the meanest daisy that turns its wee star-face to the sky graws by chance? or div ye think yon winsome child, whom ye have set up as an idol in yer heart, was man's wark? Can ye see nae signs of a high and wonderful hand in that fair face, that gracious spirit?"

"'Tis true," murmured Philip, "a God only could have formed her. But is he a just God, to bless one with such perfection, and to curse others with such infirmity?"

"Each ane has their gifts, if they wad but see them."

"But each have not the same advantages, the same opportunities given them, of learning their duty."

"As how, Mr Leigh?"

"I had no early religious training; my parents gave me no instruction or example."

"And wha's the differ, man? The Lord made it up till ye by gi'ing ye that angel-child in yer braw manhood. Then ye wad be no the waur for thanking him night and day for such a gift. 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.' What he takes in ane away, he gives twafold in another. But dinna greet; I see yer smitten wi' yer ingratitude, and it's weel ye suld be."

It is true Philip was smitten with a sudden awe, inexplicable to him. It seemed as if his heart and soul were filled with a wonder and amazement he had never felt before. The vastness of the creative powers of an all-powerful and unseen God made him feel himself as the merest atom of dust. And yet the beauty, the comprehensiveness, the power of such a Being, filled his senses with a high and elevating feeling, that made him — the proud, the unbending Philip Leigh — wish to adore with the humility and meekness of a child. An agitation ran through his whole frame, but it seemed at once so delightful, so soothing, that his heart grew calm and his face serene under its influence.

He seemed to realize that he had a Father, a Friend, a Saviour near him, on his pillow, in his heart, and the thirst of a hungry, dying soul came over him.

"Where is my wife?" he said at last.

"She is sitting on the grass, wi' an open letter on her knee; but she talks to the hound, and whiles he puts a paw on her arm, and whiles he licks her hands, and I'm thinking, like ony Christian, he is trying to comfort her."

"Will you ask her to come to me?"

"Ay, laddie. I need but tap, and she'll be up, like the flitting of a rose-leaf."

"Lotty, will you again read to me?" said Philip, as she appeared.

This time Lotty read out of the Gospels; and as her soft voice said the words of the parable of the Prodigal Son, Philip stretched out both hands, and said, "'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;' but forgive me, O, forgive me!"

"Amen!" said Lotty solemnly.

From that hour the spirit of a humble child came upon Philip.

He poured forth to Lotty the long-concealed feelings of his heart, the evil tree of envy and malice that so grew and flourished there. He laid bare the proud, bitter feelings, that prompted him to turn from her loving efforts, and trust only to his own haughty, determined will; and the more that little, slight frame enveloped itself in its own mantle of rectitude and patience, so the more did he determine that it should bend and break to his will.

In everything had he failed; with each trial she seemed but further removed from him after each attempt, but more resolute and conquering.

"And, ah, Lotty!" he continued one day, "you remember when I returned to the château, and you asked me if I had been ill; then, and then only, did a bitter feeling of remorse and despair seize me, and a sense of humiliation appeared to break me down into the dust. But such was my infatuation, such my blind madness, that, with this feeling of despair in my heart, with a whispering in my soul to forbear, to give all up, and wait your own time, your own wishes, I yet determined to make this last trial. 'Twas made, and I lie here on my death-bed!"

Lotty could only bid him be calm; she felt that such remorse was good for him.

"You have had a letter to-day, Lotty," he said.

"Yes; one from Margaret."

"May I hear it?"

"Willingly, Philip."

And as if her heart was the heart that wrote, Lotty read out the letter, with all the pathos and feeling it deserved.

"No wonder she mourns for you, my Lotty—'her best Lotty;' but you will soon be with her! Ah, wonderful is this love in woman!—so pure, so constant!—she will not think her Harold guilty. And he is not, Lotty, in this. I can make amends to Harold for many a dark thought—many a wicked wish. She wishes to go to Cowes, does she? to see the rooms he used—the place he trod last. True woman!—and only cares to have his name cleared. It will be. And, I think, Lotty, it is reasonable that wish to go to Cowes, for he may have left some papers; you may learn some circumstance that will throw a light on his strange and inexplicable conduct. For if ever a man loved his wife, Harold did, I know. Ah, poor thing!—poor, forlorn, unhappy heart, how you mourn and are weary! Write to her—comfort her, Lotty; tell her you will soon be with her, and that I leave you to her as a legacy—such a legacy as I owe for unloyal thoughts of her, for undue judgment of her character, the first time I saw her. And now send my good doctor to me while you are absent."

CHAPTER LVII.

UNDER the influence of these new feelings, so calm and soothing, Philip's health mended rapidly, so that he was enabled to be taken out for a short airing two or three times.

Mr. Laird had petitioned him to write either to his friends or his wife's, but Philip would not hear of it.

"No, no; I will have no one come between her and me. Let me have her all to myself for the short time you permit me to think I may live."

During this time Lotty had endeavored, with all her best energies, to lead him on in the path of peace and holiness; and with wonderful eagerness and thirsting he drank in every word — every draught she gave him. Such was the influence of his conduct, that Mrs. Laird again elevated him on to the topmost pinnacle of her favor, and no son could have appeared more dear to her, and for no child could she have exerted herself more.

The bairn-wife sank into a second-rate thought, with her big doggie, unless they administered to Philip's comfort.

"I almost think, Lotty," said Philip, one day, "that if I go on improving so much in strength, I may reach home. I long to see my home with the new eyes and heart your God has given me. I dream of it at night, and often think, Lotty, that it would be now to me what it ought to have been before."

"Yes, Philip; and we might ask Mr. and Mrs. Laird to come home with us. She wants to leave this place; and you know, a medical man was required at Warrington, before we came away, for the new schools and college, and we might get the appointment for him."

"You think of every one, Lotty. In a day or two we will propose it, for there will be less danger attendant on the journey, with the good doctor near; and, besides, should anything occur to me, you will not be alone."

"Now, then, we will go for a drive, for I see the little vehicle coming up the street. Run, Bear, and bring Philip's hat."

"Ah! Lotty, I gave you that dog; I gave you that one source of happiness."

"You did, Philip, and never was gift more prized, more beloved. Ah! good Bear, Lotty owes you much, that no one but you and Lotty know; and yet, I dare say, we have yet much more for which we shall have to be grateful."

It was not to be supposed that Madame La Luce would let the rich and handsome young Englishman slip through her fingers without a struggle. Certainly, if any one (Philip himself) had told her, that he but used her services to make his wife jealous, she could not, would not, have believed them.

The thing would have been inexplicable to her. She believed her own charms so irresistible, Philip could be actuated by no other motive than adoration of her. For a short time, understanding from the doctor that he was dying, she had dismissed him from her thoughts, with little difficulty, as dead. Upon hearing however that he was better, she cast about in her mind how she should accomplish an interview. So she wrote a note, which, with a handsome bribe, she gave, herself, to one of strict Mrs. Laird's servants, desiring it might be delivered into Mr. Leigh's own hands quietly.

The foreign servant, delighted even without a bribe to do a deed she knew her hard and decorous mistress would utterly abhor, executed her task with a tact worthy of Madame La Luce's own maid; Philip was in possession of the letter, without any one but the servant knowing it.

He languidly opened it, and after reading the contents, he called Bear, and gave it to him to play with.

It was a pity Madame La Luce was not a fly on the wall, to see the note upon which she had spent such pathos and sentiment now crunching into little nasty bits, under the destructive powers of the "*bête effroyable.*"

On the following day, receiving no answer, she sent another note by the post. When Philip saw the handwriting, he called Bear again, and as if it were Madame La Luce herself, Bear could not, apparently, have derived more satisfaction in tearing the unopened letter into a thousand bits.

Mrs. Laird would have fainted had she known whose hand penned the fragments she so tidily picked up and put into the fire.

Altogether Bear was favored with a good many of those notes, of whose contents no one knew anything but himself.

But Madame La Luce, knowing nothing of all this, still flattered herself, and wrote, but was taken greatly by surprise one day, at seeing the sick man, whom she supposed too weak to answer letters, driving out with the young child-wife beside him.

She wrote to express her delight at his recovery; but, as Bear did not tell what was in the letter, of course no one was aware of it.

Still finding that no responses came, Madame grew indignant, then angry, then revengeful, and then cunning. She would make the proud Englishman return to her.

On this day therefore, when they were driving out, the coachman suddenly stopped, and before either Lotty or Philip could have prevented her, Madame had tripped up the little steps of the carriage, and seated herself opposite to them.

"Drive on," she said, with cool effrontery; which the coachman, already bribed, and in the plot, did.

"Ah! M. Leigh, how *charmée*, how *enchantée! je suis de vous voir*, and so well, *aussi*, so strong, so lively, so yourself; and your littel sister, so pretty, so fresh. Ah! *mon Dieu! quel bonheur inattenda.*"

Philip's eyes flashed, and Lotty saw with alarm that the blue tint of suppressed passion and rage was gathering round his lips.

"Be calm, Philip," she said, "dear Philip," looking into his face with such genuine anxiety, love, and pity, that he felt she loved him then, and tried to answer her, by pressing her hands with tender force. "We are in the public streets now, dear Philip, and this coachman is bribed. Be calm, dear, until we get into the lane; she cannot hurt me, she shall not hurt you."

"*Ma foi!* I oblige, truly; I much oblige, Miss, your English politesse, O, so great! O, I forget, you Mrs. Leigh, dat lady so ver polite to me one time, she set her great *chien* to me! Ah! *mon Dieu!* I never forget, so I vill take my littel revenge; ve vill take drive together through de town. Coachman, go all through de town; I wish to be ver civil and polite, so I put on my bonnet *à-la-mode*, just from Paris, and all my fine things, to do you honor, M. Leigh."

As she spoke, the carriage began to go up hill, and at a foot's pace. One clear, sweet whistle, and Bear was on the seat by Madame La Luce. Dirty and damp with his run through the wet streets, his great tail went switching over Madame La Luce's face and bonnet, blinding her eyes, and destroying her personal appearance. For a moment he thought he had been called into the carriage only for a frolic with his dear mistress, but a scream from Madame La Luce changed his whole nature.

Every bristle raised, his eyes becoming blood-red, his fangs glistening, Bear gave a savage growl, and sprang towards her. Lotty threw her arms round him, to restrain him, while Madame uttered shriek after shriek.

"Get out," said Lotty, "I cannot hold him long."

With one spring, Madame jumped; but the coachman having been told to care for no row in the carriage, had not yet checked his horses, though Madame's shrieks and the dog's growls were beginning to make him think that he had better not obey orders. Therefore she fell with considerable violence on the road.

"Bear, watch Philip," said Lotty, and sprang out to help her. But the coachman, confused and amazed at the extraordinary and unexpected result of the intended drive, and the horses being half unmanageable with the cries and screams, and their being so suddenly checked on the hill, all made him, in some inexplicable manner, back the carriage, so that it went over the prostrate form of Madame La Luce. Some people came up at that moment, attracted by the cries, and, leaving them to assist the unhappy woman, Lotty was at Philip's side again in a moment.

"May I wait, Philip, to see if she is much hurt, and to place her in safety?"

He nodded an assent, for he could not speak, yet Philip was trying to exercise his new feelings, and strove to hide from Lotty the agony he was suffering.

"Are you sure you would not rather go home?"

"Go," said Philip.

They had not to wait long, for one of Madame's own servants came to her rescue and help.

She was not stunned or senseless, for, as they lifted her up, she cast a malignant, hateful glance at Philip, and screamed out,—

"You shall have de law, Mr. Leigh, you shall have de prison! you shall be fined for de assault, for de wicked treatment, and dat *bête effroyable* shall be shot."

"Drive home," said Lotty, "and fast."

Deep sighs came from Philip; the cold dew burst from every pore. Lotty could hear the bounding heart beating as if mad from imprisonment; the lips, the eyes, the clear, thin nostrils all blue, dark, death-like blue. Lotty wrung her hands, as if irrepressibly.

"For me," gasped Philip, "for me, she grieves; Lotty, the punishment is just, that this woman should be my death. But thanks to my Father in heaven, my wife on earth, I die happy."

When the carriage stopped at Mr. Laird's door, whither Bear had gone before, and brought the whole household there with his wild baying, Mr. Laird lifted from Lotty's shoulder the drooping head of a dead man, and bore the lifeless corpse of Philip Leigh into the house, while Mrs. Laird folded the shuddering, pale, panic-stricken Lotty in her sheltering arms, and carried her up to her own bed.

"Dinna greet, my lamb, my bonnie bairn! the doctor ay kenned he wad gang off suddenly; no but what he thought him better, or he wad not hae let ye gang yer lane. Weep a bit, my birdie, and dinna luik so staring like."

"It was so horrible!" murmured Lotty.

"Like enough, my wee bit angel! but he aye had time to say one word till ye, to bid ye farewell."

"Yes, yes," said Lotty, eagerly, "he said he died happy. But is he dead? are you sure he is dead? O! let me go to him; he may be calling for me."

"Ye shall come, if it will ease you, my bairn, and may be it will joost open the tear-drops. Dry eyes in muckle sorrow is aye a sign o' brain mischief."

She again lifted up the little, light form, and carrying her down in her strong arms, she held her tight, while Lotty looked at the fine but lifeless form of her husband, stretched on the bed he had left that morning with renewed signs of life and vigor.

"Philip! Philip!" she said.

No answer: the dead cannot hear.

"O, let me down, Mrs. Laird; let me speak close into his ear."

She suffered her to approach.

As Lotty looked at the calm, dead face, with the smile of happiness yet lingering on the lips, speaking again in voiceless words, "I die happy," the tears burst forth in showers.

"Yes, he is dead! he is really dead! he will hear my voice no more; he will never call Lotty again. He said that he died happy, and I, I am happy that he so died. Farewell, Philip, farewell! You will, in God's own time and of his merciful goodness, see the Lotty you loved so strangely, again. Then shall we be as the angels of heaven, and part no more."

Kissing the broad, white, death-stricken brow, Lotty placed herself, liked a tired child, in Mrs. Laird's sheltering arms, and said, "Now take me away and love me, and let me be your child until they come for me."

"My ain sweet bairn! my little pet lamb!" murmured Mrs. Laird, as she carried the little worn-out frame to her bed again; and covering her up, she saw, with tears of pleasure, that the white lids closed, the sweet face grew calm, the pretty lips red, and the gentle breath went to and fro with a calm regularity. Lotty seemed to sleep as the first sleep of a new-born baby, half its dreams in heaven.

While she was yet in this deep slumber, Mr. Laird was called to speak to an officer of justice. With the quiet common sense peculiar to Scottish character, Mr. Laird heard the official go through a long detail of crimes and assaults committed that day on the person of Madame La Luce, whose deposition having been taken, a warrant was issued by the chief magistrate to take up the body of the offender, and commit him to prison. And Mr. Laird looked at the warrant, and assenting to the officer's remark, that all was apparently perfectly correct, asked quietly what further he wanted

"I want the offender; I have my officers here, and he must go from hence immediately to prison."

"Mr. Philip Leigh?" said Mr. Laird, inquiringly.

"Yes, Mr. Philip Leigh, immediately; so I will call my assistants."

"There is no occasion," said Mr. Laird; "follow me."

"This was Mr. Leigh," continued Mr. Laird, pointing to the body, stretched out in its death-clothes. "Return to the chief magistrate, and tell him, if necessary, I will call and explain the whole matter to him; but that the chief offender and sinner in this case is Madame La Luce herself. That fine young man owes his sudden, fearful death to her. What more revenge wants she?"

This conversation took place in the German language; and as Mr. Laird poured forth his words in his strong, sonorous voice, the deep emotions of the day adding a solemn air to their effect, the officer drew back, appalled and speechless.

CHAPTER LVIII.

Mrs. Laird did not understand Lotty's character yet. After that first emotion she showed no more. There was a quiet air of content about her that provoked Mrs. Laird beyond measure. She talked of Philip in a manner as serene and cheerful as if he were still up stairs, and wrote all her letters and arranged all his affairs without a tear. She seemed rather sorry when she heard that Madame La Luce's leg was broken, and it was feared she would be lame for life.

"Poor thing!" murmured Lotty.

"Puir thing, indeed! ay, bairn; but I misdoubt grief has turned yer brain, spaking in thon daft way."

"Is she not to be pitied, Mrs. Laird? I think so, for many reasons."

"Hoot awa! set her oop i' the cutty stuil, and I wadna pity her; she letten yer bonny Philip dee in that awfu way, and no in his bed, like a gude Christian."

"But still she is to be pitied," persisted Lotty. "Philip is happy, and what is she?"

"Weel awa! ye're past my kenning. When div ye think ye'll hear fra your friends?"

"In three days now, I hope," said Lotty; "and then you will lose your plague and torment, Mrs. Laird," kissing her.

"Eh! bairn, ye hae coaxing ways, and wi' a' your queer doings, I am like to have a sair heart when I lose the sight of ye. De ye think they'll send ony body to fetch ye?"

"O yes!" said Lotty, smiling.

"And did ye tell them to bring ye out widow's mourning? Here's yer husband been buried these ten days, and ye with no crimped cap on your head. In these outlandish pairts, they dinna ken what decency is; and though I hae gettin you a guid silk dress of a deep black, with yards o' crape, not in the hail town could I get yer widow's cap."

"But do you think my curls will go under a cap?"

"Bairn! bairn! dinna be flighty; we can cut the curls off, but ye maun be decent in yer weeds."

"Cut off those curls!" said Mr. Laird; "never. I would rather cut off my leg."

"Hoot, man! dinna spoil the bairn, when I am spending my breath in learning her her duty. But, may be, ye hae sensible friends as will teach ye aright. Ye have nae mither; have ye an aunt now?"

"No," said Lotty.

"Nor a sister?"

"No."

"Nane but men folks?"

"Yes, I have some aunts-in-law and cousins-in-law."

"And wha dive ye think wull come for you? though I wish the day may be far off yet."

"Perhaps a brother will come, or, perhaps, two; or it may be one of my uncles, or, probably, a cousin."

"Och! set ye up, indeed; de ye think all the world is ready to gang clattering o'er foreign pairts, after a bit thing like you?"

"They love me very much."

"I'm thinking they could nae help it," said Mr. Laird.

"Now, Alick, dinna fleech her up any mair, or, may be, she will be getting o'er full o' hersel', spite of a' my counsels. But save us! what's at the door?"

Lotty ran to the window, as the noise of a carriage was heard rattling up the street; one look, and she bounded out of the room, down the stairs, out of the door, and when Mrs. Laird looked out after her, she saw her in the arms and embraces of so many people, she lost sight of her "bairn" altogether.

Outstripping the post by two days, rivalling the wind in their intense desire to get on, the loving Beauvillians had come for "their girl."

Mrs. Laird stood in the middle of the best parlor floor.

"My dear uncle Tom! Mrs. Laird," said the sweet, thrilling voice, putting the large Beauvillian hand of fine, tall, bluff-looking uncle Tom into hers. Uncle Tom nearly shook it off.

"And kind uncle Ned," bringing forward a larger, taller, more radiant uncle Ned, who nearly wrung off the other hand.

"And my two brothers, Norman and Walter, and cousin Frank; dear, dear cousin Frank! how is my Pro.?"

And Lotty ran from one to the other, and each one took her up in his great arms, and would have gone on kissing her, if another had not been impatient to have her; and then, at intermediate times, each and all shook hands over and over again with the amazed and astounded Mr. and Mrs. Laird. And then they all shook hands with each other, as if in such a state of congratulation and delight, that it was not to be expressed in any other form.

"We shall never forget your kindness," said uncle Tom.

"Your kindness to our girl, our dearest treasure," said uncle Ned, taking up the measure.

"You demand our everlasting gratitude," exclaimed Walter, going on.

"I am your servant for life," continued Norman.

"Really you must excuse me, I am so overpowered; will you oblige me by shaking hands again?" wound up Mr. Frank.

So they all start afresh, and then calming down again, they take the chairs offered mechanically by the bewildered hostess, and then they look at, scrutinize, with fond loving eyes, the change in "their girl."

"Did she look well?"

"Yes; they thought she did. They all agreed she did not look ill." So they all thanked and shook hands again with the Lairds.

"Did she look sorrowful?"

No; shocking as it is to allow it of our perfect Lotty (though perfect people are very disagreeable), she did not look sorrowful.

On the contrary, her heart seemed to bloom and expand under the cheering, happy influence of her own people. Mrs. Laird began to think there must be a dozen Lotties in the room, so bright, so fairy-like did she seem, as she went from one to the other.

And amazing was it to the good couple to see how first one great, fine, tall old gentleman would rise from his chair, and walk across the room, apparently only to lay the large hand on the curly head, perhaps lift up the pretty face and kiss it, and then go back to his chair; while another rose up and did the very same. Until at last, with abrupt, irrepressible truth, Mrs. Laird's wonder burst out into words, —

"Lord save us; how ye do love that bairn!"

"We do love her," said one and all; "she is worthy of our love; she is our girl, our pride, our treasure — we dote on her."

Then was Lotty kissed again by all; and the Lairds' hands were again seized and shaken vehemently.

No word was said of past events, no question asked of how and why. It was enough to the Beauvillians that they had their girl once more their own; it was enough to Lotty that she had five pair of strong, brawny arms, not to be matched in England, that only opened to present her with a home.

"Nae wonder," as Mrs. Laird whispered to her faithful spouse, "that the bairn was unco queer in her ways."

But when the good Beauvillians had departed for the night to their hotel, most reluctant to leave, but most determined in their purpose not to tease the good Lairds with their board and lodging, she made Lotty sit on her knee, and looking into her sunny eyes, said, —

"Bairn, what are ye made on! that they great men-folk love yer little finger like the breath of Heaven?"

"I do not know, Mrs. Laird; but they have always done so, and I love them."

"I dinna wonder at it. Else may be I wad preach ye a sermon this night, having such bonny, bright, griefless eyes, and yer husband no in his grave ten days."

"Dear ma'am, Philip would marry me, and would not wait for me to love my people less, and him more; and that made us unhappy, because, ma'am, ah! because — they are so good, so true, so kind ——"

"Ech! sirs, they're past everything; dinna ye gang now to be fleeched up; ayes me, but what am I saying; fleeched up, indeed, blessings on the bairn! I'm thinking yer just a bit angel slipt away from Heaven, and given to them fine, heartsome folk, as a present for their kindly natures. But me, how they shak honds; save us! I'll never recover it. But I see it all the noo. Nae wonder wi' such folk ye could na love dark, gloomy Philip Leigh, wi' a' his grand luiks. My word, when you and they were allthegither in my best parlor, I thought the gracious sun had aye come in at the winder and lighted us all up. Ech! lassie, the sight o' such folk does ane gude, and the doctor's maist demented wi' gladness and pride. Little did we twa think, as we said ye suld hae our blue room, what a treat was in store for us. Whiles I feel out o' myself, and whiles I feel just like a drunken body; but, O, bairn! we mauna forget the puir lad in his cauld grave."

* * * * *

That the loving Beauvillians had, for some time, fancied their little Lotty's marriage was concluded with rather more haste than prudence, could not be denied.

In the first place, unlike themselves, Philip was never glad to see them, never asked them to stay with him.

In the second place, he never came to see them, or brought their and his Lotty to show with pride and pleasure to all her doting relatives.

In the third place, he had carried off this treasure, so beloved, without warning, without leave. Certainly they had no right to expect he would consult them; but it had grated sore in their loving hearts that such an important matter should be done, settled, executed, and not one of them consulted, not one allowed to bid her farewell, not even her faithful nurse suffered to accompany her.

It required all the milk of human kindness, so overflowing in the Beauvillian hearts, to prevent them from thinking of Philip Leigh in a way that was quite uncomfortable to their jovial natures. And nothing but her constant and happy letters prevented the milk from turning sour, and overwhelming Philip Leigh with the curds. Not that they had wholly left their darling Lotty to the care of one, about whom they were quite unhappy not to think as highly of as they did of the rest of the world. For, unknown to her or Philip, a faithful Beauvillian had travelled after them, and, contenting himself with seeing that she looked well and happy, had returned again with the news to his anxious brethren.

It was contrary to their open, frank natures to ask any questions, or to appear to pry into things that were not brought under their immediate eyes, so that they felt but little more than a vague notion, their Lotty had better be under the care of the smallest, most insignificant Beauvillian, than wedded to the handsome, distinguished-looking Philip Leigh.

Now, they were so happy to have her once more their own, it was enough for them.

Philip might have been unkind, morose, dull, but he was dead. The grave was sacred to them, and whatever feeling they might have had, was only expressed by the perversity with which they one and all seemed to think she was still Miss Beauvilliers. And when convicted of their mistake by the servant saying no such person had any boxes there, no one was in the house of that name, they only said in excuse, "Ah! we mean Lotty."

While making preparations for her return home, which was to be immediate, both on account of their anxiety to restore her at once to her people, and because of some little domestic event about to happen in Mr. Frank's family — Lotty heard all the news of everybody.

"My dearest Georgina insisted upon my coming, though I felt that even you, dear Lotty, would have forgiven me, had I so far restrained my impatient feelings on account of Georgina's interesting situation. But when we received your letter, when we felt that you must be brought home, brought home properly; though at first there were far too many of us who had settled to come, my dearest Georgina said, 'You must be one of those chosen, you must go to our darling Lotty; for if you don't, you shall not have the girl you wish for.' Think of my dear Georgina saying that! she did, indeed; and I thanked her from my heart. And whether she gives me a girl or not, I shall be grateful to Georgina all my life for permitting me to be one of the favored, happy few to escort you home, dear Lotty."

The Beauvillians created quite a sensation in Homberg. They visited Lotty's old lodgings, and left substantial marks of their having been there, to the inhabitants thereof. They went to see the good old Bonne, and besides giving her such a donation that she had never before beheld so much money at one time, they emptied a shop of its bonbons, and distributed them among the children under her charge, who had contributed, though in so small a degree, to their Lotty's happiness. But they thereby endangered their lives for weeks to come, except that children's stomachs are, through some wise provision, made to contain an incredible amount of sugar-plums.

As for the good Lairds, it seemed to them that some genial spirit had taken entire and full possession of their house, while the beaming presence of the fine fellows remained there. And the gratitude they expressed! Besides perpetual shaking of hands (indeed, if he had only been encouraged, Mr. Frank looked as if he could gladly salute the chaste but withered cheek of Mrs. Laird), the whole set of Beauvillians, in full conclave, presented Mr. and Mrs. Laird with a very handsome present in money to indemnify them for all the trouble and anxiety they must have had with their Lotty.

Not that they believed she was a trouble or anxiety, or that Mr. and Mrs. Laird were so foolish as to think they did do so; but it was just their way, to remove any idea of gratitude.

And, as if that was not enough, each Beauvillian, in secret and privately, presented Mrs. Laird with a present of their own, just as if that one, individually, was more indebted to her kindness than all the others.

And when she would have expostulated as she received the third secret present, and openly said how she had received two besides, she was not even listened to.

"Of course, of course — very right! I knew my kinsmen would not forget such a duty; and you must be kind enough to keep our presents as a remembrance of us."

As if she was ever likely to forget them! And so all things being ready, after a leave-taking that was enough to shake the nerves of the winged Nineveh bull, if it had any, Mrs. Laird found herself sitting in the middle of her parlor floor, drowned in tears, and Mr. Laird endangering his limbs and his life, by stretching so far out of the window to take a last look, wave a last adieu.

But they had not departed without leaving a token of respect, at least, to the memory of the mistaken, self-sacrificed Philip Leigh.

Lotty's last act was to put a packet into Mrs. Laird's hand, saying, "You will see a proper monument put up, and everything done just as if he were your 'bairn.'"

CHAPTER LIX.

Loving and lovely Margaret, with your shadowy form, your ethereal face, your gentle, calm submission, your pure faith, your pious patience, let us return to you.

Basil had found the sea strewn with light floating articles belonging to the "Marguerite," too surely indicating her fate, and selecting from these one or two well-known articles, had placed them, as we have seen, in that abrupt manner before Lady Katherine.

There might seem a degree of cruelty in this act, especially as Margaret, all unknowing to him, had witnessed the scene. But they had rightly judged her character; pity and sorrow for the poor mother made her lock up in her innermost heart the grief and loneliness she was to carry to her grave. She felt that they had meant to shock the mother's feelings for a peculiar purpose, and divined the cause.

No murmur escaped her lips, no duty was left undone. True to her unselfish nature, she urged Gerald with fervor to remove Millicent at once to a warmer climate. Her delicate frame seemed to suffer for those she loved, even more apparently than the mourners themselves. Yet, notwithstanding all this, they saw Margaret growing thinner and paler every day, presenting the appearance of a living, moving body, but the soul was far away. To Basil it seemed as if in her eyes there always dwelt the scene of the heaving, restless sea, bearing within its bosom that beloved form.

"She will die, if we cannot do something to change her thoughts and feelings. If Lotty were but here now!"

"It is strange," said Millicent, "she has never mentioned Lotty. I do not like to do so; in fact, I dare scarcely speak; it seems to me that but a cobweb thread holds her life and reason."

"Yes, her sensitive nature suffers when all is calm; unlike the violent outpourings of poor Lady Katherine, that fortunately weaken themselves by their very vehemence."

"I am glad Mr. Grey is to live in the house with Lady Katherine, she seems to have taken so great a fancy to him."

"Yes, Milly, so now you and Gerald may leave with comfort; and the sooner you go, remember, the more you please Margaret. I should like when I see her to-day to say you are gone."

"Do so, Basil; for it was but the pain of leave-taking that has made us linger. We are all ready, and only last night agreed it would be best to depart in secrecy."

"Much better. None of our nerves at present can stand much more strain on them. I will spend an hour or two with Margaret, and will then follow you to Liverpool. She will be interested to hear the last news of you."

It was thus they cared for and thought of their poor stricken Margaret.

When Basil joined them at Liverpool, he told Millicent that Margaret seemed relieved by knowing they were gone, and, taking advantage of the moment, he had spoken to her of Lotty.

A slight flush rose on the white cheek, the eyes lost that ever-searching, mournful look, but all she said was, "My Lotty will come to me when she can."

"Thus, Milly, we can hope for no particular change just yet. When the little, bright, cheerful spirit joins her Margaret, we may expect some good, for she always seemed to divine what her school-wife most loved."

"You will write to Lotty, Basil?"

"I hardly think so; she has enough to bear without. Now, Milly, farewell; I need scarcely say to you that you have no easy task before you, for Gerald bears within his breast a bruised and contrite heart."

"You are right, brother. Until he meets Harold face to face before the judgment-throne of God, he will never cease, while breath is given him, to implore mercy and pardon for the share he thinks he has had in Harold's fate."

So Margaret's mother came to live with her, and the bleak December passed away, bringing in a stormy, violent January.

She had been to her nursery to watch her fine boy enjoy his dinner; she had looked into the cot that contained a rosy, sleeping babe, whose red lip was never to be pressed by a father's kiss; she had seen her steward, and transacted all her business with him; she had read to her mother the psalms and lessons of the day; and with the same dreamy air, and quiet, listless manner, she called for her bonnet and shawl to take her daily walk.

"The sleet drives in great gusts," remonstrated the nurse; "you will take cold, my lady."

"I cannot take cold," answered her lady, mechanically.

"The gardener says there will be soon a heavy fall of snow, my lady."

"Does he?" answered Margaret, still as in a dream, while she put on her bonnet. "Do not take the children out, then."

And she went.

"One would suppose she never heeded what I was saying," murmured the nurse; "and yet she must have done so to have remembered the children. The Lord touch her heart with life again, for it is sore to see her thus!"

Margaret went to Rose Leigh, her daily custom. Lady

Katherine, as usual, received her as if they had not met for years, installed her in her own chair, and hovered about her as a loving hen guards the one nestling left her. Pru. was in an excited state to-day, and had a great deal to tell Margaret. In fact, ever since the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, and the arrival of Mr. Grey, Pru. had been growing more and more enigmatical in her conduct. And had Margaret ever heard the episode of the curate, absorbed as she was, she must have noticed Pru.'s manner.

"I have heard from dear Georgina," said Pru. "Frank has left her for a short time."

"Indeed," answered Margaret.

"Mr. Grey is so much liked among the people, my dear daughter," said Lady Katherine.

"Ah!" answered Margaret, unheeding Pru.'s violent blush.

"There are snow drops appearing already, dear Margaret, cold as the weather is."

"Is it cold?" said Margaret.

"Mr. Grey said it was bitterly cold," continued Lady Katherine, "and he is the best judge of weather I know."

Again Pru. flushed and grew pale.

"Shall I walk back with you, dear Margaret?"

"If you please," was her quiet answer.

During this walk, which lasted much longer than from Rose Leigh to Court Leigh, Pru.'s excitement broke out into one incessant chatter, in which a certain pronoun, he, was mixed up with everything on which she discoursed, and which on less unheeding ears would have divulged poor Pru.'s secret. Once only did Margaret show interest.

"It was Lotty's doing, all dear, darling Lotty's plan," said Pru.

"What plan?" asked Margaret.

"Why," answered Pru., blushing vehemently, at being asked a question she did not expect, "that he came."

"My Lotty came?" asked Margaret, in perplexity.

"No, no, though I wish in my heart she had, then all would go right; but it snows hard now, dear Margaret, so I will run home, as you must go in."

Margaret did not go in, she liked the wild weather; it brought a pulse of life in her heart to watch the wintry elements. They seemed typical of her own withered hopes.

"Lotty," she said to herself, unconsciously, "my Lotty! I wish she would come. It seems to me, her presence would prove to me like the first snowdrop of spring, seen in this wintry weather. Ah! Lotty, if you were here, perhaps you could devise some means by which I could visit that spot, behold with my own eyes if the sea can give me up no message from her dead. If I could have something; even in the hour of utmost danger, he would have written to his Margaret, he would have sent me some last directions safely enclosed within some floating casket. I know, I feel sure there is such, and if Lotty were here —— "

" She is here, Queen Margaret, these are her arms round you, her kisses pouring on you — but stay — say nothing, speak not to her, for there is your treasure, your message from the dead. Your Lotty would have been here before, but that she knew what her Margaret wanted. She went, she sought, she has found it. Take it, sweetest, dearest mourner! Basil was the real discoverer, your Lotty only the diviner; now, here, in the little summer-house, you will be alone, unwatched, unseen. God bless my Margaret! "

And Lotty, placing in Margaret's trembling hands an oil-skin packet, directed to her, kissed her cheek with passionate fondness, and left her alone.

First Lotty went to the nursery, and kissing young Harold, took her little goddaughter in her arms, and said, " This is my child, nurse."

" God be praised for it, ma'am! and, more than all, that you have come back. We have looked for no change in our dear lady until you could arrive."

" God has been very good in giving me the power to bring her a last token of remembrance from her husband."

" Heaven be praised! 'twas all she wanted." And the tears fell in showers from the good nurse's eyes.

Lotty now went across, spite of the driving snow, to Rose Leigh. She peeped in at the window, and saw Lady Katherine, with her feet and nose comfortably near the fire, knotting away with an indefatigable perseverance worthy a great cause. On the other side of the fire, equally comfortable, sat a gentleman! The sound of his strong, sonorous voice came through the window; he was reading aloud. Rather behind her mother sat Pru., who ought to have been knotting; " but O! " as Lotty upbraided her afterwards, " her knotting was on the floor, and she was gazing, unabashed, on the face of a young man, not more than forty years of age."

Lotty went quietly into the room, but Pru. was not so absorbed in her occupation as to forget old friends.

"Dearest, dear Lotty! you have returned to us at last;" and the knotting became inextricably entangled in the legs of two chairs, as Pru. sprung nimbly round them, to embrace her.

With touching, childlike feeling, Lady Katherine looked at the little girlish thing, and said, "My dear, don't kiss me, do not be kind to me, for I am a very unworthy, wicked woman! I love to see your sweet face again; we have been longing for you, but I have widowed your Margaret; I, I have broken her heart. O, my son, my son, my only son!"

"But I will kiss my Margaret's mother thus and thus, and I love Harold's mother as if she were my own, and I bring her the greatest comfort she can now have, a last fond letter from her son, full of love and forgiveness, I know."

"Where? — O, where? — let me see the blessed words!"

"Margaret has the letters; we must leave her alone with her treasure as yet."

"O, Lotty! how did you get them?" asked Pru.

"Basil has written to me constantly all the news from here, and all he knew of that fatal night. He felt that some of these days Margaret might like to know every particular; then I should be able to tell her, or to show her the letters. He has collected every paper, every account, every circumstance that occurred to our Harold from the time he left home, until that fatal Thursday night. From that time he has given me a history of his own voyage, when Gerald accompanied him. Again of a second one, when he discovered the fatal truth, and found those few sad remains; and among other things that he has collected, is the figure-head of the 'Marguerite.' The instant I knew this, I called to mind several things that I had heard poor Harold say of this figure-head. How he had had infinite pains taken with it, so that it should resemble Margaret in attitude and face. How he should consider it as his guardian angel, and that it might indeed prove so to him, for it was constructed in a peculiar manner. Further, I remember in particular, he said, — 'The image of my Margaret shall never be destroyed or wrecked. It shall float, though all the rest of the vessel is riven in pieces;' so on my road home, we appointed Basil to meet us at Cowes, and there, in the 'Ripple,' was laid all that remained of the ill-fated 'Marguerite.'"

"Proceed, dear, dear Lotty; O, finish your tale!"

The heroic little Lotty was stifling her tears.

"The figure-head of the ship was so like my Margaret; her small, graceful head just turned and bent, as if in the act of listening; the slight hands touching, half laced together by the fingers, her own peculiar attitude, as you know. But Basil wondered why I examined it so minutely.

"'See, Basil,' I said, 'it has not been separated from the ship by violence or blows. It has been carefully unscrewed and sent adrift.'

"'You are right, Lotty,' he answered, 'and these hollow tubes must have gone through the beams. The screws must have penetrated to the cabin, or been fastened from there.'

"'And unfastened again. Let us sound it, it is almost hollow within.'"

"Suffice it to say, we found a spring, which opened to us the hollow cavity, that, filled with air, caused the figure-head to float so buoyantly when all heavier things were swallowed up in those shifting sands. And within was also Harold's last message to Margaret. I have brought it and given it to her."

"Ah, Lotty! best Lotty, you are well-named, but my son can send nothing but upbraidings to his mother. Nevertheless I will meekly receive them; if my poor, dear, widowed Margaret forgives me, and has fond messages to her from his watery grave, I shall be very grateful to a merciful God. It will be quite as much as I deserve."

"God afflicts none more than they are able to bear, dear Lady Katherine," said Mr. Grey.

"I feel that; nay, I know it. What ought I not to suffer? yet how am I blessed!"

"I am very glad to find Mr.Grey is living with you," said Lotty.

"Under God's blessing, he has saved my soul, dear Lotty! from very sinful murmurings and despair. I was almost lost in every way, for my Margaret was too good to me."

"He is very good and kind to us both," murmured Pru., blushing violently.

"I am very glad to hear he is kind to you," whispered Lotty back again.

With all her tender heart and melting sorrow, some things bewitched little Lotty into being mischievous.

"When shall I see my Margaret?" began Lady Katherine, with nervous tremor.

"We must not disturb her," answered Lotty; "when she is calm, she will join us. If she has comfort to bestow, so much the sooner will she come."

"How well you know her character," said Mr. Grey; "it seems strange that one so faultless should be thus tried."

"Pure gold is tried in the fire," answered Lotty.

"Lotty," said Lady Katherine, abruptly, "where is Philip?"

The little childish thing looked up with amazement for a moment — then she glanced at her black dress.

"I thought I heard he was ill, dead," continued Lady Katherine; "but I am grown so selfish, so absorbed, you must forgive me, dear child. You have no white cap on your head like my Margaret; your pretty curls are as usual; I trust he may be spared to you, poor, little, young thing!"

The color deepened in Lotty's cheeks until they bloomed like winter roses. Then she said, —

"I have come home to be once more Margaret's little school-husband, for we are both alone now; God has taken Philip Leigh to his rest."

In the little summer-house did the widowed Margaret read this letter, a message sent by the sea from her dead.

"Margaret! what is this I have to do? I have written to you before. Thank God! I wrote from Jersey; a letter — such a letter as I ought to write to my Margaret. And now but a few days are passed since that was penned and sent; and in this scrawled, blotted, stained sheet of paper, you are to take my last message, the only letter you will ever receive from the Harold you loved so well, the last token of his love for you.

"O Fate! Fate! could you pour no other vial of wrath on my devoted head? Was the measure of my sins so great, that I was to bear for three days (each a lifetime) alternate hope and despair; gleams of strength and resignation; hours of horror and remorse; every feeling that can lacerate the human heart, yet bid it hope against hope; was I to bear all this with a man's weak spirit, only to learn that death is about to part me and thee, Margaret? One man on board — but one — announces that nothing can save us. But he is the only experienced sailor we have, and my reason bids me feel and know that his words are true. I see the drift of the under-current, ignorant sailor as I am. I watch the light articles tossed over; they all float one way, to a doom that is inevitable. Let me collect my thoughts, let me strive to take leave of my Margaret as befits her husband. An irresistible impulse bids me write; all these three days it has urged me like the sharp prick of conscience. I obey; incoherent, hasty, desponding and despairing as my words may be, I write to Margaret, my wife, my fond, loving wife! O God! wilt thou not hear my prayer? Let me see her again, for her own sweet sake, not mine. One word, one look, 'tis all I ask. A slight preparation! she can have none; it is impossible: naked, plain, in all its stern truth, the fact will be told her, as in a breath, 'Your Harold is dead, drowned — drowned in the very vessel he made your rival!' How she will feel for me! how she will gasp and say, 'In any other way, O God! I could have borne it better; but not from his own wilfulness, not his own headstrong will.'

"But, Margaret, I can comfort you there. 'Tis true, my mother's letter drove me away. I expected an answer from you to that I wrote from Jersey — (I love to think upon that letter, it was a fitting one for you) — and I received hers; only that one from my mother, and a message from you in it. A newspaper, too, with that lie! those lies! Did you believe them? O, no! no! mad, fierce, wild as was my passion, in the midst of all it drove me to do, one small voice would repeat, 'Margaret loves you! Margaret trusts you! why care for others?'

"But I must needs get away into the wide, open sea, out of sight of land; that land, which held so true and fond a wife and mother! So I gave the order, and when we were many hours away, I went on deck to breathe and think. The wind blew in fitful gusts — it cooled my brain. Suddenly, a sweeping, soft air came rushing by, as if stirred by angels' wings, and a voice seemed to speak to my heart, —

"'Remember Margaret's state. Think of her tender, sensitive nature. The word that attainted her Harold's name would be as a sword entering her heart.'

"And so, Margaret, as if the touch of the Saviour had driven the demon from his hold, and the holy words had dismissed and rebuked him, did I become calm and in my right mind. I gave the order to return at once, and went down to my cabin and thanked God. I then saw it all. My mother so angry; my Margaret so hurt with her; perhaps she had, all unfit as she was, travelled to Cowes, to meet and console, and love more fondly than ever, her wayward, but not wicked, Harold — her traduced, foully-slandered Harold. But a fear crept in silently, fixedly, the shock might have been too much. My Margaret is so very tender, so sensitive for her Harold. Perhaps she had gone already to heaven, taking with her a little, blighted blossom. Perhaps those two stars were her seraph eyes, beaming down on me, and bidding me prepare. Those stars I saw but three nights ago. If so, Death, I welcome thee, hideous as thou hast presented thyself. I am calmer. I was going to comfort you; perhaps there is no need for me to do so; but my mother — poor mother! she meant nothing, I know. If I had reached home within an hour after sending that letter, I should still have been her dear son. So I wish it known to all, that not on me rests the sin of hurrying all these unprepared souls to their last account.

"I said I gave the order for the ship to return, and went down to my cabin. My company were not congenial to my present thoughts, and I remained for many hours; until I thought we might see lights on the island.

"All was wild, dark, stormy; a desert of sea and waves.

"'When shall we reach Cowes?' I asked of the helmsman.

"'Cowes! we had a second order from you, through one of the young ladies, to keep our course for Holland.'

"So, Margaret, they did it. Let them weep and wail. Let them upbraid and weary Heaven with their cries; on their own shoulders rests their doom.

"They thought I was actuated by whim, in going out to sea; they had a whim not to return. Thus are we lost through folly.

"And Mr. Clare; to him we owe it that we have so poor a crew, a captain utterly weak and incapable, ignorant even to my own extent of nautical matters. But one man on board knows these fatal sands. A greater man than I am once escaped them. Why should not we? I must hope. God never gave me such a gift as Margaret — to tear me from her thus. And yet I valued her not. O God! if I see her once again — if I hold her once more in these arms, second to thee only shall she be! She will teach me to worship and praise thee. Poor Gerald! Tell him the promise has come true — 'He has cast his bread upon the waters, it will not return to him void.' I remember scoffing at his text — 'Make Thou Thy servant to delight in that which is good.' But useless for me is that prayer now, though it haunts me. But a few hours more, the old seaman says —— The ship drives heavily. Margaret, I would not that you should think these blurred, unsteady lines are other than accidental. Your Harold is calm. Hope may be departing, but God is at the helm. I think again of Gerald, and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;' but forgive me! O, forgive me!

"Thus do I pray, at every moment that I do not pray for thee.

"I have been on deck. In a vain hope to aid us, for want of coal, we have burned every available thing within the ship. Doors, partitions, all are gone. We group together, for we cannot separate. None can go hide their grief and despair; nakedly shown before us all are the different phases of woe in all their human weakness.

"My companions gaze on me, preparing these papers — my will — for you, fond wife. They derive comfort from my calmness, thinking the wild scene above is but a hideous drama, in which they take no part. Poor Miss Clare! Poor Augusta! — she beseeches me to save her; and calls upon you, my Margaret, to hear her vows and promises. Never more will she give you one moment's uneasiness — never more will she see or speak to me again. I believe her there; but I smile in pity at her words. My Margaret knew all her Harold's sins and weaknesses; I thank God I have nothing to confess. She upbraids me as the cause of their impending doom; again I thank God, and so must you, Margaret; not only is my soul free (for even her companions chide her for her words) from this charge, but He who sees into all hearts knows I would freely give my life for hers, so unfit is she to die, while I rest in the hope of the thief on the cross.

"My boy! Make him the Harold I ought to have been. With his mother near him, I know his father's name will be green in his memory evermore.

"If God has given you a fatherless child, Margaret, take it into your innermost heart, as your Harold's last gift.

"You have much to do, fond, loving wife — loving, idolized, adored Margaret — my estates to redeem, my people to reform, my name to clear, until it is second to none in honor and truth. Margaret will do this ere I see her again. God help and support me! These people moan, and shriek, and cry, but who among them has to leave a Margaret?

"Again I have staggered on deck. A little sloop rides on every crested wave two miles astern. I fear for her; but the old mate says she can float in safety where we cannot go. I feel strangely interested in her; she is the last earthly thing on which my eyes will rest; she will, most probably, witness our fate. Evening closes, but we will burn blue lights. Haply, when she sees them suddenly extinguished and hears the wild cry of drowning agony, some pious heart on board will say, 'God have mercy on their souls!'

"I told you, in my letter from Jersey, of a young girl who was of our company, a cousin of Miss Clare's, a little, delicate, fair thing. On our first danger she grew pale and white; but during this lifetime of alternate hope and despondency (which has made your Harold's hair turn thus, Margaret — see, I have cut off your favorite lock — by the white hairs so suddenly strewn in it, think, wife, how your Harold mourns for you, bereft and lonely) — during this time, I say, that young girl has uttered no cry, has made no moan. She followed me everywhere with her large, sad eyes and wistful face; and, as if in answer to my questioning look, whether I could do aught for her, said, — 'Pray, let me stay near you; it does me good, and strengthens me to see you.'

"For very sad, my Margaret, is it to see the others; those who ought to be their nearest and dearest comforters have blindly drowned their sense of danger in wine. 'Tis a pitiable sight. I know you will be glad to think I had a little gentle spirit near me, to whom I could do some good. I have written, at her dictation, a letter to her sister, the only near relation she has in the world, and whom she disobeyed, coming on this ill-fated voyage — that is, she came against her sister's wishes, who is much older than herself, and who does not love the Clares. The innocent child thinks her dreadful death a proper judgment on her. She says her sister is poor, and was made still more so by her efforts to afford every pleasure and good she was able to this little sister.

"'Now,' she says, 'she will be free from me, and need go out to teach no more; but she will sadly mourn and weep for me, and who will comfort her?'

"'My Margaret will,' I answered.

"'Then I have no other care,' she said. 'If I may hold your hand, as we go down, I will neither shriek nor cry, sir, or struggle. God will be good to me, and take my soul at the first rush of the water!'

"So now the hour comes. A shock sends a trembling thrill, as if of life, through every timber of 'the Marguerite.' Loud and shrill rise those shrieks of agony and despair! Poor Augusta! unhappy creature! she knows not what she says so wildly. Her sister-in-law falls fainting back: that young, quiet child kneels by my side and prays!

"Comfort my poor mother.

"And now to put up this packet. Margaret, my fond, sweet, loving Margaret! your Lotty will bring you these words — your best Lotty. I remember telling her my plan that the guardian angel of my ship should float, did all else perish. She knows you will not live without your Harold's adieu. So, take it —take my last fond blessing, and, with it, acknowledge that, however dreadful my fate, however hard my doom, yet can I bear it all; for, through the mercy of my God and Saviour, I hope to meet my wife in heaven!"

* * * * *

None may lift the veil that shrouds such mourners, for the weak language of man is unfitted to describe their grief.

It was the fourteenth of February. Lotty had met Basil in the cedar walk, to give him the daily account of Margaret.

"Will she ever recover, Lotty?" asked he mournfully.

"Yes; Harold bid her live; she will do it."

"It is your birth-day, Lotty," said he.

"Yes. I wish I was dead!"

"Nay, Lotty, what could we do without you? Margaret would have died but for you."

"Have you settled all about that old Miss Clare?"

"Yes; she is now at the Rectory, and seems well fitted to take charge of it until my sister comes home."

"And how does she seem?"

"Why, Lotty, she appears to have been very fond of that little sister, and ——"

"Refuses to be comforted, of course; mourns like us all."

"But she is a good woman, Lotty, and says she will make no unworthy moan, for God has comforted her, only the shock was great."

"I suppose I must go and see her."

"Yes, Lotty, and read the little sister's letter; but not to-day, for you have a birth-day sad enough already."

"I wish to have no more; this world is too sorrowful and bad to live in."

"Do not quit it yet a while, Lotty; we have much for you to do; besides, Bear would die of grief—to say nothing of others."

"I'll bequeath Bear to you, but now I must return to Margaret."

"First tell me, Lotty, does she take an interest in anything?"

"Yes, she reads Harold's letters all day, and looks at and touches that half black, half white, curl."

"Does she speak to you, Lotty?"

"Yes, she says drowning cries pierce her ears, and she sees stormy waves and drowning people when she shuts her eyes."

"Ah, don't, Lotty; you harrow my very heartstrings."

"Then don't ask foolish questions."

"Nay, just a few more. Does she see her children?"

"Yes, she weeps over them, until I have to send them away."

"Does she think of you, Lotty, and love you as ever?"

"Yes, when she reads Harold's letter."

"Does she talk much of him, and mention his name?"

"She speaks of nothing else, and says no other name."

"How long is this to last, Lotty?"

"Just as long as she chooses, so good-by."

The next day Lotty came springing to meet Basil, with a step that showed her heart was lighter.

"Do you know, Basil, she remembered it was my birth-day, and thought it so sad I should be but eighteen, yet a widow; — as if she were much older.. And she called to mind, of her own accord, how my father used to send the cart into Bath, laden with good things, and presents for the whole school, on my birth-day, and she smiled; it was her first smile, but so sad, so wan ——"

"Do not weep, Lotty! you see you are to be her best earthly comforter, yet."

"And, Basil, she asked about Miss Rachael Clare, and said, you always fixed upon the right thing for everybody."

"And what more did she say?"

"Why, she said, that is, she feared she had been very selfish ——"

"How, Lotty?"

"About me?"

"I do not understand; pray explain."

"I have nothing to explain, Basil; only she seemed to remember I ought to be in grief, or I was in grief, and that she ought to comfort me, and all that."

Basil tried to catch a glimpse of Lotty's face, but failed.

"You know, Lotty, you did wrong to marry."

"No one suffered but myself."

"Dearest Lotty! who could have had the heart to give you pain?"

"I only pained myself."

"But poor Philip's greatest fault ——"

"Was loving me too much," interrupted Lotty, quickly.

"I do not wonder at it," exclaimed Basil, abruptly. Then recovering himself, he raised her hand to his lips, with the air of a courtier saluting his rightful queen, saying, low and soft, "True, loyal wife."

Lotty received the truth and the compliment with a very sedate air, as if it were nothing to her what Basil thought or said.

"Now when do you intend to go to your own home?" she asked.

"Are you tired of me?" he answered.

"Not at all; only, as time alone can now help Margaret, it is useless your moping about here, when, perhaps, you are much wanted at home. I feel sure Hugh and Brian wish we all had been drowned together; and so do I, for the matter of that."

"If you think I can be of no further good, I will gladly return home; for though my boys have no such base thoughts as you mention, especially as regards yourself, they really do require me."

"Then, good-by."

"Nay, be not so impatient to be rid of me — you will write to me?"

"Yes, once a week."

"Then I shall come down between each letter, to inquire after you all."

"I will write twice a week, then."

"I presume I must be content with that: and if you want me ——"

"I'll telegraph, or send Bear."

"Very good: you will write the first letter to-morrow?"

"No, the day after."

"You will think of me, Lotty, far away from you all?"

"Yes, as very happy with your brothers."

"As very unhappy, until I see you again."

"Time will mend that, as you must not come for six months."

"Luckily I shall be wanted in less than three. I am little Harold's guardian."

"Then I will amuse myself by spoiling him to give you some trouble."

"Good-by, Lotty! do what you please, I am of Brian and Hugh's opinion, you cannot do wrong."

"Good-by, Basil; Heaven send you better judgment. Shake hands, Bear, like a gentleman, for Basil is going away."

The day after Basil reached home, he received a letter from Lotty, as follows: —

"I AM obliged to write to you, Basil, because Margaret wishes it; she says she would like to have seen you before you went, but I know better, so do not grieve about that. A little more strain on her nerves, and they would break, and you are so foolishly tender-hearted, you would never bear up as I do.

"I am also to tell you, she wants her image, that guardian angel of the 'Marguerite,' you know. We left it in the 'Ripple;' we might have known she would wish to have it, without troubling her to ask for it. Also, you are to find out if ever the drowned are washed up off those sands; and further, every particular about the storm — how many vessels were lost, and how many souls went down. And please to collect all that the newspapers said. You know we have carefully kept the sight of them from her, and she bids me ask you to keep them all, — for the time may come when she will take a melancholy pleasure in looking at them; and for the sake of the children, no incident relative to their father ought to be lost. But pray answer this letter to her: it is better for us both. She can read your letter to herself, and as for me, my heart is not stone. The Beauvillians are good lovers, but indifferent mourners: they know not how to be unhappy. If they lose a friend or brother by death, they say, 'He was good and worthy; he has gone home, where we shall soon follow.' If misfortunes come upon one, the others flock round and say, 'Here, brother, take of ours; we have enough, and to spare.' If sickness and pain afflict any, 'Ha!' say they, 'in the next world we shall suffer nothing.'

"You must know, Basil, she has smiled again. It was at a letter from my cousin Frank. I would send it to you, but really his paternal felicities are not fit to be seen by any but very friendly eyes. The newspapers will tell you of his happiness. I am going to see Miss Rachel. The name of Clare gives me the shivers. Young Harold cried for something this morning; mindful of your responsibilities, I gave it to him. — Bear's love. This letter is written by a disconsolate being, called

LOTTY."

Though Basil is not to see Mr. Frank's letter, the reader shall have a peep at it for old acquaintance' sake.

"MY DEAREST LOTTY:

"My beloved Georgina, with the fortitude only possessed by her sex, has made me the most delighted of men as well as the happiest father. You remember how kindly she insisted upon my coming for you, and threatened me with a certain punishment if I did not accede to her wishes; and now my darling Georgina has fulfilled her promise, made so sweetly to me, even better than she said she would, for at half-past three on Sunday morning (just before the propitious 14th of February) she made me the happy father of the sweetest little girl you ever saw, and within half an hour she presented me with another equally charming.

"You will allow, dear Lotty, that my feelings naturally would be very much overcome, and will therefore excuse a longer letter, and that I mix nothing of sorrow and sympathy in one announcing such an auspicious event.

"I will only further say, the beloved mother and sweet babes are doing charmingly, and just now my dearest Georgina whispered to me, one little daughter should be called Lotty, and I said, in answer, the other should be Georgina, for we had had our little dispute about the name; most fortunately settled by the never-to-be-sufficiently-praised conduct of my dearest wife in presenting me with two lovely girls.

"Your most happy, overcome kinsman,
"FRANK BEAUVILLIERS."

"Poor, dear Pro.!" said Margaret.

"The Beauvillians will be rampant," answered Lotty.

CHAPTER LX.

THERE was something remarkably pleasing about Mr. Grey: without being handsome, there was a mixture of intellect, sense, and good humor in his countenance, that attracted attention, and warmed the heart towards him. His manner was uniformly lively and cheerful, yet never obtrusive; in fact, he had the gift of always appearing at the right moment, and always saying the most appropriate word.

Long ago, in younger days, when his kind heart was enthusiastic as well as kind, he had felt a warm interest in the poor Miss Leighs. Like little, uncomplaining doves in a cage, they cooed through their dull, monotonous lives in as unobtrusive a manner as they could; hemmed in by forms and ceremonies, they hardly knew that there was any other existence by which the many little tendernesses of their hearts could be occupied.

Yet Mr. Grey had in the short period of their acquaintance discovered that both were well furnished with gentle, kind natures, only waiting to bud forth on fitting reason, and wanting nothing but opportunity to blossom into full fragrance.

Miss Leigh, in particular, appeared to him so peculiarly fitted to render a sensible and affectionate man happy, that he had begun to question himself as to the propriety of seeking her society further, without any reasonable hope of gaining his wishes, when Lady Katherine put a sudden and peremptory finale to whatever incipient hopes had begun to bud. The blow was more heavy than Mr. Grey imagined; and bidding adieu to love, he turned his quiet energies into other channels.

As curate of a large and populous parish, he had but little time to think of Miss Leigh, and do his duty. As rector of a small living, he undertook to educate a number of half-brothers and sisters, and tied himself and his fortune down, for the benefit of their mother and them.

The greatest excitement and indulgence that he ever allowed himself was the study of geology, mineralogy, and botany; in all of which sciences he gained a proficiency.

When he received Mr. Herbert's offer, through the instrumentality of Mrs. Leigh, and found himself again in such immediate contact with the first object of his affections, he naturally concluded that the love of stones, flowers, and strata, which had held him in such unbounded thrall for ten years, was much superior to the half pity, half love, he had for three short months felt for Miss Leigh; so sure was he of this, that arriving in the very moment of their heavy calamity, he had, at Mr. Herbert's request, fearlessly taken up his abode with Lady Katherine and the gentle Pru.

We have seen that the latter, having had no rival, save Lotty, and nothing to divert her thoughts, was still faithful; and, indeed, she was not far wrong in thinking that the ten years had only passed over Mr. Grey's head to improve him. He bore within him a contented, cheerful heart, a well-disciplined, active mind, moderate and easily pleased desires, with a strong pervading principle of religion, that never slumbered or waxed faint; with such a man time had no dealings, years passed over him as lightly as days on the indolent and unthankful.

Pru. was not so fortunate; good, sweet, and amiable as she was, some little secret corner of repining had touched her cheek with a few wrinkles, had somewhat angularized her form, and imparted a slight tendency to redness in her nose. But whatever she might have lost in beauty, Mr. Grey soon began to discover she had gained in amiability.

Mineralogy, botany, and geology were certainly bewitching sciences. In their services he had almost forgotten the existence of Miss Leigh; but when they came to be placed in actual contact with her feminine virtues, and he had to compare the delights of discovering a new flower, with her gentle endurance of her mother's whims, or a curious fossil, while she, with gentle eyes, told him of some new patient requiring his tender, Christian care; then we are bound to confess Pru. rose high in the scale of his regard, while mineralogy, botany, and geology kicked the beam together. He came at a most fortunate moment for Lady Katherine, who was only saved from insanity by hardly having sufficient sense to realize the horror of her work.

But she was in that state that made her cling to any one who would relieve her from the dead weight of sorrow and remorse, — feelings she could hardly comprehend, yet which would make themselves felt. It was with the heart and spirit of a little, humble child that she threw herself into the pious hands of the kind, mercy-loving John Grey.

So soothing were his efforts, so gentle his persuasive words, so pure his faith and piety, that under his care she grew calm, yet not forgetful; happy, though always repentant; apparently much like the Lady Katherine of old, yet essentially different.

Meanwhile months went on; May was beginning to deck the earth with her flowers, and render it fragrant by their sweet odors.

"Lotty, love, I am told you are repairing and painting High Leigh. Do my mother and I tie your sweet spirit down too much with our dulness?" Thus spoke Margaret on that May morning.

"I should be dull away from you, and that you may believe. No, Bear and I are fixing up High Leigh for some friends of ours to live in; they were very kind to us when we were lonely and sad in foreign lands; and though we do not wish you to be ill, yet we hope that you will catch a little cold now and then, or the children have measles, that you may employ the valuable services of Mr. Laird."

"Are those nice, kind people really coming, Lotty?"

"Yes, Queen Meg, I am going to let them have High Leigh, because Mrs. Laird was so fond of poor Philip, and will like to live in his house, and we ought to have a medical man nearer to us than Dr. Murray, and he is glad of help besides; so altogether we think it a fine arrangement."

"An arrangement very like you, my Lotty."

"Bear and I, if you please. We settled it a month ago, because, in the first place, we like living with you and Lady Montagu, and secondly, High Leigh does not agree with Bear's health. He suffers from neuralgia there, and nervous affections; is it not so, old fellow?"

Bear whisked his great tail by way of assent, whereby a hideous, but most valuable piece of old Dragon china went smash on the floor, swept off by that ever-active member; Lotty scolded, and Bear looked meek and penitent, so was kissed and forgiven.

"Bear and I have also another scheme in our heads, only we cannot do it without your help."

"Command it, best Lotty."

"We wish to make a matrimonial contract between John Grey and Charlotte Leigh."

"Lotty, love! what strange thing will not you and Bear do next?"

"Not at all strange, sweet Meg. They knew each other long ago; they loved each other then. Watch the gentle Pru., and you will see she is more than 'full fathom five in love' now. But Mr. Grey is too conscientious; you must lend us your help, otherwise he will leave on a sudden, knowing Lady Katherine's former wishes. He will fear that she is biased now, by her liking for him; and though I think in his heart he loves sweet Pru. dearly, yet will he hold the secret closely shut within it, unless you interfere."

"I will gladly do so; I should like my dear mother to have so kind a son; we must not lose him from such motives — but I am so selfish, Lotty, I see none of these things —— "

"When you are selfish, then believe that Bear and I hate each other with a biting, acrimonious hatred, not to be matched."

"When I am rich enough I wish to build a little church, Lotty."

"Yes, a memorial church in the Upper Park, half way to High Leigh, and Mr. Grey shall be curate of it, when Gerald comes home."

"Ah! Lotty, you see into people's hearts, you know everything."

"Yes, truly; among others, that your mother wishes you to go from home."

"She wishes, Lotty, for us all to go to the sea-side."

"Then we go."

"I suppose so," answered Margaret, sighing; "for myself, I want but one change."

This was said so low, Lotty might well be excused pretending not to hear it.

"Here is Pru., crossing the lawn. Now, Margaret, watch and see if my little love tale is not true. Dear Pru.," continued Lotty, "in what manner have you been uncivil to Mr. Grey, that he is going to leave you?"

"Leave us! going!" cried the poor unsuspecting Pru., with most innocent dismay. O dear! O dear! how unhappy I am!" and sinking into a chair, she burst into tears.

"Only this evening, dear, to dine with us," said the naughty Lotty; "but as you seem to take even that short separation to heart, perhaps Margaret will ask you also."

"O! dear Lotty, I did not think you could be so unkind," sobbed Pru.

"Dear Charlotte," said sweet Margaret, "I like your Mr. Grey very much, and you need not be ashamed to love so good a man. Some of these days I shall hope to see you his good and gentle wife."

"I think Lotty is really very, very unkind," answered Pru., for once in her life feeling hot and angry. She had reason to be nettled at the unkind means Lotty had taken to surprise her secret.

"Margaret would not believe me, dear; she said you did not care one bit for him," pleaded the mischievous penitent.

"O! but, dear Margaret, he is so good, so kind, that is, mamma thinks, and I always knew, I mean of course, dear Margaret, it is not as that unkind Lotty says, because, you know, he never says anything; and I dare say never will, because it is not to be expected that ——"

"Margaret can make any sense out of all that you are saying. Kiss me, and forgive me, like a good Pru., and I will never be naughty again."

"You know I must kiss and forgive you, but still you were very unkind; and if somebody had done it to you, I know what you would say."

"What now, dear Pru.?"

"You would say, I hate the man; and, perhaps, even if you loved him ever so much, would never speak to him again."

"And pray will you do the same?" asked Lotty, smiling.

"No, I am not Lotty. I do not pretend to be anything but poor Pru."

"And therefore much more to be loved than naughty Lotty. So now that we are friends, take care of one thing. I may fancy Mr. Grey myself."

"Then, dear Lotty, you will be a happy woman."

"Now, that is very magnanimous of you, Pru.; but there are two reasons against my ever marrying Mr. Grey, even if I did fancy him."

"And what can they be, dear Lotty?"

"He loves some other person better than me, and Bear is decidedly against the connection. See, he looks quite fierce at the notion."

"Our Lotty is very silly sometimes, is she not, Charlotte? but her little eccentricities serve her purpose; which is, to make us smile."

"But I don't quite think this business was fair," begun Pru.

"It was most unpardonable; but you had better say no more, for Mr. Grey is at the door," answered Lotty.

"And why should he not hear what you are saying?" said he, being nearer than even Lotty deemed him.

"Because 'Love lies bleeding' is not the other name for 'London Pride,' and you think it is," answered Lotty, promptly.

"Humph!" said he, gravely; but his eyes twinkled.

CHAPTER LXI.

Sadly and sorrowfully Margaret walked hour after hour by the heedless waves. It was at Lady Montagu's wish they had gone to the sea-side; she felt that the longer Margaret refrained from seeing the cause of her sad fate, the more nervously would the fear of doing so distress her. Once recover from this shock, then would her patient, pious heart turn to the world, to fulfil the work she had to do therein. They had no fear for the consequences; they let her indulge herself to the full; pouring out her griefs; upbraiding that cruel, remorseless sea — yet loved, touched, looked on, as the vast tomb of her Harold.

It was Lotty's custom to sit at a distance and watch Margaret; she seemed to know by intuition the auspicious moment to join her. And Lady Montagu would feel that evening was a bright one to her, if Margaret's fair cheek had the faintest bloom on it.

One day, as Lotty sat at her post of observation, she saw coming down on to the sands a stout lady, dressed in such a profusion of colors, it cost her some trouble to reckon them all up. A pink parasol was prominent; a sort of yellow-ochre shawl enveloped her large person, showing portions of a bright green silk dress beneath; her bonnet was tastefully done up at all points with little blue feathers, that, irritated in every tender fibre by the sharp sea-breeze, raised themselves into odd shapes and positions, giving the bonnet a strong resemblance to a frizzled fowl. The sand was soft and heavy, so that she left large, deep prints of a substantial foot, as she labored through it. She was followed by three nurses, each carrying a pale looking baby. Every baby being conspicuous in gorgeous clothing and waving plumes.

Lotty watched Bear make a tour of observation all round this party, who huddled together at the sight of him like a flock of alarmed sheep. The lady especially tossed down her pink parasol, and spread out her ample green skirts after the fashion of a fearful hen.

"Bear, who is it?" said Lotty, to that discerning individual; "it can be no one we know. O! you think it is. Let us go and warn Margaret then."

"Margaret, see, there is Carry!" said Lotty to her.

"Ah, no, Lotty; the sylph-like Carry can never have expanded into that person," answered Margaret.

"It is Carry," persisted Lotty; "look at the babies."

"The small one looks rather like the one she brought down to Court Leigh, Lotty."

"About the eyes especially," answered Lotty, "and also in regard to a certain uncertainty as to the safety of its head. I always felt averse to taking it, lest that important article should roll off. I will send Bear to inquire. Now, old fellow, go and do your duty. If that is an old friend, salute her like a gentleman."

"They will be alarmed at Bear," interrupted Margaret.

"Then you are not to go too near, Bear, or you will send those babies into convulsions. There, Margaret! it is Carry. Look at Bear, how sulky he is; he knows he must behave like a gentleman, and salute her, but he is thoroughly ashamed of the acquaintance. She is much too smart for his homely ideas."

"Then, Lotty, we must also go and pay our respects."

It was, indeed, their old schoolfellow, who greeted them in a most cordial manner; considering, as Lotty said afterwards, they were not babies, and had none with them.

"O!" said Carry, "I really am delighted to see you. I shall have such pleasure in showing you my darling children. Nurse, put Cecil down, that Lady Leigh may see how nicely he walks."

Cecil whimpered.

"O! never mind, then, nurse; you shall not walk, my darling, if you don't like. Some day, Margaret, when you are on the sands, and he happens to be down on his legs, I will just give you a signal to come up quietly without his knowing, because he is so very shy. And see, I must introduce you to my little Arabella. Belle, Bella! look up, mamma's pet, look up, my darling! Nurse, do you think she seems inclined to kiss her hand?"

"No, ma'am, I don't think she looks inclined to-day; she is a little put out, ma'am, by the dog."

"O! then we will not force her; I make a point, my dear Margaret, of never asking my children to do what they don't like. And doesn't she like the ugly dog? Ah! naughty beast, go away; Bella shall have a stick and beat him!"

Arabella got up a ray of intelligence into her countenance upon this announcement. Luckily, Bear bounded off.

"And now, nurse, show Lady Leigh the baby. Robert won't look at her, because she is a girl, and he wanted another boy; but she is much the flower of all my pets."

Certainly the baby was larger, fatter, and more flabby-looking than what Cecil had been at her age.

"Little pet!" said the fond mother, kissing her. "By-the-by, Margaret, how is your poor boy — did you ever rear him? I am so much out of the world now, and am so occupied with my darlings, that I hear no news of any sort or kind, except that some one of the name of Leigh, it struck me, I had seen was dead, in the newspaper." Here she looked up, and the pure, Madonna-like face of Margaret, appearing from beneath the close white cap, and deep black bonnet and veil, struck on her baby-locked mind. "O, I beg your pardon! — I really forgot!"

"Pray don't apologize," said Lotty, "for either of us, as we can fully believe that the care of such babies must make you forget everything."

"Well, Lotty, if I did not know that you were very good-natured, I should say that you spoke ironically," said Mrs. Royston, getting red.

"If you take it as ironical, pray do. But I do not see why you have not as much right to think of nothing but your babies, as a fisherman has of fishing."

"But I did not mean to be unkind, Lotty."

"I am persuaded of that," said Margaret, gently; "so, pray make no more excuses. My little boy is quite well, thank you; I left him with his sister and the nurse just by those rocks that you see half a mile off. He was intent upon making a fortification on the sand."

"Good Heavens! Did you leave them all alone, with only their nurse, and such a number of ill-looking fishermen about?"

"I have done the same for the last month, Carry, without any harm arising therefrom."

"Nurse, turn the baby's head this way now, I begin to feel a little breeze from the sea; and, Betsy, you do the same by Arabella. That's my pets!" continued Mrs. Royston; and they were both kissed by their mother, for submitting to the change without much whimpering.

"And so you have a little girl, Margaret? What a comfort that is! And is she a nice, healthy child — or has she the same fearful tendency to fits that your poor boy had?"

"She is healthy and strong, thank you," began Margaret.

"And Little Harold never had a fit in his life," interrupted Lotty.

"Dear me, how strange! I have always felt so much for you, dear Margaret, wondering what you would do if you lost him suddenly ——"

"Good-by, Carry," said Lotty, abruptly; "I must go and see what my pet is making such a fuss about."

"I did not know Lotty had a child," said Mrs. Royston, looking round, as the little indignant thing went off.

"Her pet is her dog," answered Margaret.

"How sad," said Carry, "that she should waste her time and affections upon such a great brute! Did it frighten my darling? Never mind, we will soon beat him away."

"I hope Mr. Royston is quite well," said the gentle Margaret.

"Indeed I know nothing about him," answered Carry, with asperity; "he insisted upon going to see some races, though the doctor especially enjoined the darlings going to the sea-side; so, of course, if he neglected his duty to his children, I was not so unfeeling. Nurse, throw their veils up, the breeze is gone again."

"Good-by, Carry, for the present," said Margaret.

"Good-by, dear. I would offer to accompany you on your walk, for it is quite a pleasure to see you once again, and I should like to have a long talk with you about our children; but, you see, I never leave them. Every moment requires a change — which none but a fond mother can see. But I should like to call upon you, and have a chat about happy old times."

Lotty, as if intuitively knowing that Carry was only adding stab to stab, now called Margaret, and they left the sands in the peaceable possession of Mrs. Royston and her nursery. The next day, Lotty besought Margaret to go out at an unusual hour. She had made it her business, in the early morning, to discover Mrs. Royston's sea-side habits, and, for several days, was successful in avoiding a collision; but Mrs. Royston discovered that all the world in that small sea-bathing place were thinking and talking of nothing but the fair, pale mourners, clad both in such deep crape; and the interest and excitement about them was none the less from the seclusion in which they lived. Their history was too well known, through public report, for them to hope they were unrecognized. But the fact gained them this advantage — they were never intruded upon.

Curious eyes, from a distance, might scan their every movement with interest, while gathered groups would meet only to discuss some new fact concerning them; but the hard hand of fate had so oppressed them, a sacred air seemed to hallow the spot they breathed in, rendering it too holy for busy, bustling, worldly thoughts to enter. Thus, with a rare feeling of delicacy, — a feeling they warmly appreciated, — it was sufficient for Lady Leigh to select her portion of the sands, and none intruded on her. Nevertheless, the little world of health-seekers, pleasure-hunters, pebble-finders, bathers, sketchers, and all that incongruous crowd who frequent a watering-place, each, for different reasons of their own, indemnified themselves for their forbearance by talking.

Thus Carry found herself, on a sudden, elevated to a pinnacle of wonder and interest that she had never gained, even as the mother of the most charming babes in the world, merely because she was seen speaking, on apparently intimate terms, with the objects of their devoted attention. And when it was discovered she had actually been at school with both of them, and bridesmaid to one of them, she was nearly torn to pieces (metaphorically) with visits and questions. The three lovely babies stood in great danger of being neglected, while Carry was undergoing the trying ordeal of being a popular character.

On the third day, she announced her intention of calling. Several parties invited themselves to a sea-side tea on her return, that they might gain the earliest particulars of the visit, and be ready to retail them all at bathing-time next morning. So Carry departed, aware that from every window of the Crescent her progress would be watched, until she arrived at the little, insulated, ivy-bound villa, in which her schoolfellows had secluded themselves and their sorrows. She was gorgeously apparelled for the occasion, and the three white, watery-eyed babies shone conspicuous in crimson feathers, and broad red sashes to match; whereby the youngest of all seemed rather to be composed entirely of sash, without reference to anything of the baby kind. It was a strange, incongruous company that was thus shown into the cool, dark drawing-room, where the holy spirit of pious, patient grief sat enthroned.

"Well, dear Margaret, I have brought the dear children with me; I thought they would serve to amuse you and divert your thoughts. But, Lotty, would you oblige me by turning out that horrid dog? My darling Arabella is beginning to whimper already."

"Bear, go away," said the Little Bear, in her most morose mood.

Bear arose majestically, and casting a glance of mingled contempt and disgust upon Mrs. Royston as he passed her, he reared himself up to his full proportions, and, with wonderful skill, got out of the window and disappeared.

"Law!" said Carry, rather alarmed, "what an odd dog! did you teach him that, Lotty?"

"I never teach Bear anything but to love me," answered the Little Bear, with the nearest attempt to a growling tone she could accomplish.

"It is very wonderful, Mrs. Royston," said Lady Montagu, "to see how that dog understands Mrs. Leigh. You need not be under any alarm about your children, for I can assure you he is more like an old nurse with little Harold and his sister."

"Dear me! are they not afraid of him?"

"On the contrary, they think no treat so great as a romp with Bear. His services are often required to amuse baby, when Margaret lays her on the floor, during the nurse's meals."

"I should like to see your children very much, Margaret," said Carry, secretly wishing to compare such an apparently ill-used baby with her own, so much more carefully nursed.

They were brought down; and even in the half-withered heart of Margaret there rose a deep feeling of pride and delight as she showed her dead Harold's princely boy to her schoolfellow; while Lotty recovered her good-humor, as she took in her arms the little, laughing, crowing babe, fair, fresh, and sweet as new-plucked violets — a striking contrast with her dark, intelligent eyes and rosy, baby beauty, to the poor little sash-laden Royston baby.

"Make your bow, Sir Harold," said the nurse, "and shake hands with the young gentleman."

Little Harold obeyed with the gravity and propriety of a highly-bred young courtier, and then looking round, said, "Where is Bear?"

At the sound of his name, a pair of deep-set eyes, and fine drooping ears, became visible over the window-sill.

"O! don't let him come in!" cried Mrs. Royston, who was beginning to think Bear something of the demoniacal order.

Bear showed all his fangs, as he smiled a grim, sardonic smile of scorn, and disappeared.

"Bear is a good dog, ma'am," said young Harold, eying her with irrepressible curiosity.

"Ah! my dear, you don't know what he might do if you were alone with him; he might eat you up, for he is as big as a wolf."

"He would eat the wolf up, or kill him as Gelert did Prince Llewellyn's dog."

"I do not know Prince Llewellyn, dear; but if I was your mamma, I would not trust you, an only son, and likely to be so, and a title to keep up, with such a great beast as that."

The greater part of this speech being Greek to young Harold, he contented himself with asking if he should read to her the history of Prince Llewellyn.

"Read! good heavens! Margaret, do you mean to tell me your boy reads at his age? He'll die of water on the brain, mark my word."

"It is rather too soon to teach him much; but having, for his own amusement, shown him the letters, he has almost taught himself the words."

"It's wonderful he continues to look so healthy," answered Mrs. Royston, scanning the fine straight limbs of the boy, and unable to detect a flaw in the beautiful, blooming face. "And how old is baby? I do not remember to have seen her birth in the paper."

"My little granddaughter," answered Lady Montagu, with solemn gravity, "is eight months old; she came to bless her mother's life with a new interest, at a time when God seemed to have forsaken her."

"She is a gift from the sea," murmured Lotty, kissing her little namesake and godchild.

"Are your children strong and healthy?" asked Margaret, whose cheeks flushed and paled with every word, for all she spoke so calmly.

This proved a fortunate question in some respects, for though it led Mrs. Royston into a long and uninteresting history of her three children, and the showing forth of their various perfections and talents, it was only tiresome, and not wounding. Once upon the topic, like a good hound in full cry, Mrs. Royston nor stopped nor stayed for any other matter, and the rest of her visit passed off pretty well.

Upon her return to her own house, she was enabled to report a vast quantity of new materials to the general fund of conversation. And though these were somewhat mixed up with "I gave her my mind; and I told her what I did in Cecil's case; and I advised her to treat her exactly as I did Arabella," with further enlightenments regarding those interesting points, yet they learned many new facts. Such as,—"The boy was called Sir Harold already by his nurse. The girl was eight months' old, and born very mysteriously. The young Sir Harold could read, and had a very broad forehead, indicative of water on the brain. Mrs. Leigh wore no widow's cap in the house, but Lady Leigh looked all cap, her face was so small and thin. The nurse kissed the baby, just as if it was her own, and ordered young Sir Harold about as if he was only a common boy. But Lady Leigh was given that way; she had always allowed her servants to take liberties. Young Sir Harold wore a common brown Holland pinafore, and the great dog was a demon, just that, and more."

By the next morning, all these interesting particulars had increased tenfold; consequently, whenever Bear inadvertently, allured by an innocent hilarity, ventured to extend his gallops beyond a certain verge, a general flight of brown straw hats, frantic nurses, and alarmed children, took place, clearing the sands like magic.

Having gained her purpose, namely, that Margaret should get over the first shock of seeing that remorseless, but beautiful destroyer of her happiness, Lady Montagu proposed a return home.

A third visit from Carry hastened them. They could not hope she would always talk of her children, and even that hope, as Lotty said, "she wished was safely deposited in Pandora's box." The hope was becoming worse than the disease.

* * * *

They found Lady Katherine overflowing with health and delight at seeing them. Pru., thin, nervous, and fidgety; Mr. Grey, solemn and silent, very unusual for him.

"Pru., what have you been doing to Mr. Grey?" said Lotty, severely.

"O! my dear, dear Lotty! I do not know. I am so unhappy, I have been longing for you every day."

"Have you refused the poor man?" again asked the stern little questioner. "For if you have, I shall be obliged to ask Bear's consent to marry him myself."

Here Pru. wept; and between sobs and tears, much misgivings, and great takings on, Lotty made out that Mr. Grey talked of going away, leaving Rose Leigh, High Leigh, all the Leighs, as soon as he could find a substitute.

"Alack and alas! This happens because I went away."

"Of course it does, dear Lotty."

"He thinks he ought to leave because he loves you, and must not take advantage of Lady Katherine's present bias in his favor."

"Yes, indeed, dear Lotty, that is just it, if you will not think me very conceited."

"No! not very; but I think he carries his ideas of honor too far."

"Yes, yes, a great deal; indeed, indeed, Lotty, he is far too honorable."

"Well, that is not a fashionable crime; so you think he loves you!"

"Yes, dear Lotty," answered Pru., blushing and faltering. "Though he rarely speaks to me, he always does everything for me."

"As how!"

"He always opens the door for me, and always sets my chair, and he watches me silently, and he picks up my knotting."

"Poor man! he must be worked to death. And does your mother say nothing?"

"No! she only seems to like him more every day, and she calls him John; think of that now, Lotty!"

"Humph! and do you call him John?"

"O, no! Lotty. How can you think so, or that I would so far forget myself?"

"I'll bet you a lock of Bear's hair against one of Mr. Grey's, that you call him John soon."

"Lotty, Lotty! you are no wiser since you went to the seaside — you will joke."

"We met Mrs. Royston there, which was no joke. Now, dry your eyes, look happy, and try to sit still for an hour; then if I find you have done so, and are a good girl, I may have some news for you. Kiss me, just to show we are friends."

"As if I ever thought otherwise, Lotty."

An hour afterwards, Margaret was seated with Lady Katherine.

"Mother," said the low, soft voice, like a gentle breath blowing through myrtle leaves, "Mr. Grey talks of leaving us."

"Ah, my daughter, my child, say not so — what should I be without him?"

"He loves our Charlotte now, as he did ten years ago."

"Is it true? can so great a blessing be vouchsafed to me, unworthy sinner as I am? Ah! Margaret, but for him I never should have borne the sight of your sweet face again. But for him I never would have knelt to the God I so sinned against."

"I know it, mother: it is my wish, it has long been so, that you should give him the sacred title of son."

"Bless you! Heaven bless my Margaret! I know not which way my weak, foolish feet would lead me, but for his sustaining arm. I am but a child, Margaret, in such ways, still blindly stumbling among all my former wicked sins."

"Nay, mother, think not thus; a loss such as ours, leads us straight to God's footstool. But Mr. Grey — he thinks if he asked you now for our Charlotte, you would not refuse, but he fears you would repent hereafter."

"Never, never; ah! Margaret, how can I convince him?"

"You must speak to him, mother, and learn his real feelings. Then you must say (after he has really told you he loves her), that I would take it kindly of him, if he will occupy in your bereaved heart the place of my Harold."

"Ah! my daughter."

"Yes, mother, it is so. Then if his feelings are still scrupulous, we must send for Basil. Perhaps our Lotty may devise something."

"That she has done already," said Lotty, entering as she spoke. "I have told him that even if Gerald Herbert does come home, you are going to build a new church. I am going to endow it, and he will be required to serve it. I also gave him a sermon, under three heads, with an excellent text, on the folly of being too scrupulous, and the inconvenience of having an undue proportion of conscientiousness. And that the heart of an honest, good man, showed its sense by acting with calm discretion and judgment, and not flighting violently off into most uncomfortable but grandly heroic acts, that generally killed two or three people at the onset, and made all the rest so miserable, they wished themselves dead also. 'For my part,' I said, 'when I see a man acting in an outrageous manner, I mean outraging nature, and all the good feelings we get from Heaven, because he fears the world may deem him acting an interested part, I then think he is a hypocrite. Most part of his feelings regard himself, and the rest are worth nothing.' Whereat he winced capitally, Queen Margaret. All men are weak on some point, and Mr. Grey's is a desire to be thought highly sincere."

"He is a good, excellent man, and I would he were my son, Lotty, if I am worthy to have such," said Lady Katherine.

"I think he is going to speak to you the first opportunity, madam; for, as I said to him, 'Do you mean us to go down on our knees and ask you to become connected with us?' he reddened in a violent blush, and said, 'God forbid that I should expect as a right what I would beseech as Heaven's best boon.' Rather pretty; I have treasured up the words for Pru.'s benefit some day."

"Where is he now?" asked Margaret.

"He is perambulating the cedar walk. I know, by the expression of his face, and the manner of his walk, he is going to search his heart, and lay it before God. He is a good man, truly, but I fear he would have borne his own burden of the flesh bravely and silently, save for Pru.'s sake. So you like my Lairds, Margaret?"

"Yes, Lotty, how they love you! Ah! my little Lotty, what did I not hear of you?"

"I am afraid, dear child, you must have suffered much with poor Philip," said Lady Katherine.

"Nay, madam, ask Mrs. Laird; she will tell you I was aye a feckless bairn, and no fit for a wife. Margaret, don't you love Miss Rachel?"

"Yes, Lotty, with a strange love too; it is so unlike anything I ever felt before for any one."

"Come, come, I shall be jealous; but in her quiet, simple, earnest manner, I see always before me the wise virgin, with her lamp trimmed, waiting with wistful, loving eyes, the coming of her Lord. She has had much sorrow."

"And the last brimmed her cup."

"For a time, Margaret. For she says, now she can see the vista of a peaceful close to her life, the only time of rest she has ever enjoyed. I like to see you together. You are the stricken angel whose dove's wings are shattered and broken; she is the grave pilgrim, quietly marching, with upturned face, over the cutting stones and rude paths of this earth, unheeding aught but the light beyond."

"She does me good, Lotty."

"I know it, Margaret. Hand in hand your treasure and hers passed into the rough sea of death together. Hand in hand you two will walk through life, supporting each other in the same hope and wish. But here comes Mr. Grey. See, Margaret, his step is firm, his head thrown back, his eyes bright. He and his conscience have settled the matter comfortably. He is coming straight to ask Lady Katherine to be his mother, like an honest English gentleman."

"Dear Lady Katherine!" said Mr. Grey, approaching her at once, on entering, without heeding Margaret and Lotty, "may I be your son? May I express the love that has been so long burning in my heart for your Charlotte, and ask her to be my wife?"

Old Lady Katherine elevated herself to her utmost height, as she would have done in former days, on some grand court day. But this time her only motive was to put her arms round Mr. Grey's neck, and say: 'God bless you, my son, my dear son! for making me thus happy."

"But you?" said Mr. Grey, turning half to Margaret, while he supported Lady Katherine still.

"I wish you to be Harold to her," said Margaret.

"Are they not too kind, Mrs. Leigh? Tell me, am I not too presumptuous?"

"Yes, a great deal. How do you know if Pru. will have you?" answered she.

"O! go for her; send for my Charlotte. Let me know, ere I sleep to-night, that this happiness is really to be mine," cried Lady Katherine.

"I will seek her," said Lotty; "for I agree with you, the sooner we get the matter settled the better."

"Pru., Pru.," said she, on discovering the object of her search, still sitting where she had left her, "your mother wants you immediately to knot."

"I will come," said Pru., with sighing meekness.

"She does not require you for the usual sort of knotting, but for quite a new kind of work, which may be styled knitting knots," continued the flighty Lotty, as they went down stairs.

"Knotting is rather wearisome," sighed Pru.

"Well, if this new work proves so, whistle for Bear, and he will undo it all."

This time Lady Katherine did not insist upon the offer taking place under the walnut trees, in full sight of her decorous eyes. But Pru. found herself, all of a sudden, alone, in the small, green drawing-room with Mr. Grey; and before she had time to recover that fact, he had gently drawn her close to his heart, and was beseeching her with eyes and speech, to bless him with the gift of her heart, and suffer him to call by the holy name of "wife," the woman he had loved so long and well.

CHAPTER LXII.

Miss Rachel Clare was a woman with whom the world had dealt hardly from her earliest childhood. Her father was no whit behind any of the Clares in vice and wickedness, but had distinguished himself among them by breaking the heart of a gentle, amiable wife, causing the early deaths of all his children, save two, from harshness and privations, and grinding down his poor daughter's soul to the extremest point of suffering and degradation; until, fortunately for her, and the little baby sister, whom all had cared for, in the midst of their troubles, the measure of his iniquities was completed. He was called to his account.

Upon his death, Miss Clare found herself and her little sister totally destitute. But now that her fate was in her own hands, it was no part of her creed to endure the worst suffering of all, namely, a precarious dependence upon the scant humiliating charity of her relations.

She opened a day school, and toiled early and late the first year, to make both ends meet. She was successful beyond her hopes, though her exertions and anxieties paled her cheek forever, and caused the gray hairs of age to take early possession of their place. She had but one pleasure, the love of her little sister; and as she bloomed into the beauty peculiar to the

Clares, she gave greater proofs of goodness than were usual in that family. Rachel still worked harder than she ought, to give her little Fanny all the advantages she was born to, and perhaps was somewhat injudicious in suffering the pretty, little, gay girl, to taste of pleasures, however sparingly, in which she did not share. A little wilfulness was beginning to spring up on the part of Fanny, which was just shadowing out an ominous cloud of further sorrow for Rachel, when a terrible, fearful death put an end to both feelings forever.

The first breath of this awful intelligence came upon Rachel like a withering simoom. They had parted in anger. The elder sister remembered the sharp words of reproof with which she had dismissed her wilful Fanny — yet her darling, her pride, her sole happiness. Never more should she hear the little, soft lips beseech the pardon she was sure to demand; never more should she press them again in full forgiveness. The time was past, gone: unforgiven — unkissed — unblest, the little, girlish thing of sixteen had met a terrible fate, with no tender ear to hear her last cries of despair; no fond, sisterly arm to become her sheltering tomb. Unable to save, yet happy to die, so that they had died together, was Rachel's thought. There were none to sympathize with her — none to console. The Clares were but little loved, and in the eyes of the world, the terrible death of one rich and well-born, like Sir Harold Leigh, absorbed all interest, leaving none to bestow upon the young and thoughtless girl.

Nothing was now left to her but to die. She prayed of God to take her, that she might the sooner meet the little spirit scared from its earthly tenement so fearfully; and yet reason and life remained to her.

How long the struggle might have lasted, it is hard to say; but, like a messenger from her little sister, came Lord Erlscourt, bearing in his hand, not only her last words from the sea, but the consoling sympathy of hearts mourning still more deeply than her own. She was ready to perform the bidding of those who were henceforward to be connected with her by sorrow, that strong binder of heart to heart.

She barely took time to read her Fanny's dying words, so urged was she in spirit to adjourn at once to a country and people where sympathy would hallow her grief and render it bearable. Away from Cowes, the scene of all her hard life, she might hope to find consolation in thinking of her little one; she could better school herself to endure her loss, take comfort from her words, and look on grief more bitter than her own.

With Fanny's letter close to her heart, the poor, lonely Rachel left Cowes in Lord Erlscourt's company the same evening; and ere she arrived at her future abode, the Rectory, gratitude and hope brought a pulse of life into it. She looked with interest at her new home, around which no painful recollections gathered themselves, and thought that ease and comfort would now be hers, for Lord Erlscourt's arrangement was riches to her. Under these circumstances she could read and weep over her Fanny's letter, without feeling that God had entirely deserted her. But when she saw that pale, stricken wife, within whose shadowy eyes there dwelt a look so sad, so desolate, yet withal so resigned and unearthlike, she folded her hands in prayer to God, beseeching him to look down in pitying love upon such woe.

And then she joined her efforts to those of all around her, to watch over and guard that "wearied and heavy-laden" mourner.

She placed in poor Margaret's hands, without a word, her treasured letter, over which she nightly prayed, rightly judging that the artless words would have their due effect. It was as follows, partly written by Sir Harold and partly by the little girl herself, just sixteen.

"My mother-sister, your Fanny will never see you more. Is not that sorrow enough to break her heart?—and yet there is something worse before her. Great waves are rising high on every side, and they rush in anger on our ship. O! sister, your little Fanny sees them coming, and knows they will soon ingulf her, and she will be but a little reed, broken and crushed in those wild waters. Your little, petted, indulged Fanny, who would have shrunk at the touch of death, even circled in your dear arms. But there is one very kind and good to me, Sir Harold Leigh; he writes these words for me, because I tremble, sister. I think how I left you in anger, but if God hears the prayers of such a little thing as I am, he will hear me asking pardon of you, my only mother. But I must drown in those dreadful waves, and never hear you say, 'I love my Fanny more than all the world.' Sir Harold says God hears my slightest word, even in this wild tumult. I pray that he may not hear poor Augusta—she raves. And yet she leaves none behind her to mourn as that Margaret will, whom Sir Harold names with every prayer, or even as my Rachel, when she hears of her little Fanny's doom. He has read to me that Holy Book, and he has prayed for me, because I am so weak and trembling, sister. I think, if we had parted in love, I might have been braver, I might have been sure that God would listen to my prayer. But, sister-mother, he says I must comfort you. What shall I say? You will look at his Margaret, and then feel that your loss is as a drop of water to her ocean of grief. And if I am wayward now, I might have become worse. Sister, perhaps God has taken me from the evil to come. I think to myself, it will be but one shock, and then I shall be safe in heaven, and can never more be wilful and disobedient. I might have become very naughty. I felt pleased to be thought like Augusta, and O! Rachel, if you could see her now, — God have pity on her! No prayer comes from her lips — she cannot hear the Holy Book — she will not listen to the calm words of resignation that Sir Harold has for all — yes, all of us. He has gone on deck, and said, if I wrote but one line, it would comfort you. And I make the trial, if it is but to tell you, Rachel, that this good and noble man has saved his soul, I feel; for during these three days of anguish and fear, he has been the comforter, the supporter of all. The meanest man among the crew, receives from him the same care and thought that I do, a little, weak, timid girl. By his piety, fortitude, and solemn preparation for death, he has nerved many a weak soul on board; and when our awful summons comes, he will take with him, in the same hour that his own soul is required, all those whom he has thus fortified. They look at him with wonder and admiration. And I like to think, sister, that perhaps already the Holy Son of God is hovering halfway between heaven and earth, ready to take the fine and noble spirit so fitted for Paradise, at once there. And I may hope to go with him, and many others think as I do, I know. And, Rachel, you will be able to tell her this, that Margaret whom he says will comfort you, she will like to know that this Harold, whom she loves so well, made a little weak girl fearless and resigned, by his noble example. The ship drives so, Rachel, you must not think I tremble now by my writing. In a short time all will be over. When you mourn for Fanny, remember who has lost a Harold, and thank God, that you may endeavor to comfort her. For, dear sister-mother, a lifetime thus spent, would be all too little to repay what he has done, through the mercy of Jesus Christ, for the soul of your little, fond, loving Fanny."

CHAPTER LXIII.

So Lotty's birthday came again. And the snow was deep on the ground, and the branches of the trees were all marked out in pure white lines against the deep blue sky.

Lotty and Bear were out walking, and the crisp snow sounded under their feet as they went, with a cheerful, pleasant noise; and Lotty's breath rose up in the clear, frosty air, like a little tiny cloud, while Bear's enveloped him all in a mist, that settled itself in small icicles over his bristles, ears, and coat, making him look, for the nonce, an aged, gray-haired dog.

They had had a very busy year, and had done a great many things, and now they were looking forward to this year as one which should raise the heavy pressure of grief from the hearts they loved best, and permit the dim eyes of sorrow to look once more with pleasure on the world in which they lived.

Fresh, bright, beautiful frost! No wonder Lotty and Bear bounded along as if still very childish, both of them.

They were going to High Leigh in the early morning, to see Mr. and Mrs. Laird, get a cup of milk warm from Mrs. Laird's beautiful Ayrshire cow, and be back by Margaret's breakfast hour.

"Ech, bairn! but ye luik like a rosebud the morn. And sae ye air nineteen years awld the day. One wouldn't think it, to luik at her, Aleck! but she has had a world o' sorrow to mak up. Ye ought to hae been grayheaded the noo, bairn, wi' a' yer troubles."

"You see I have such a hard heart, Mrs. Laird."

"Hard heart! at no hand, bairn, say that; if yer heart is hard, whatten a sort o' heart hae ither folks getten? Hae ye ony news for us?"

"Yes, you are to please to come and dine to-day, you and the doctor, at Court Leigh."

"And wha will we meet, think you?"

"First, there will be Lady Katherine."

"Ech! puir bit silly body, she has nae such sense as even the big doggie."

"But it is better to see her so humble and childlike as she is, Mrs. Laird, than what she was before."

"I dinna luve to see auld, ancient folks like her leaning on little bairns like you for counsel and advice. It's no natural; and when ye are to the fore, or the pretty Lady Leigh, she'll no step the floor, unless ye advise her."

"That is her humility; she wishes to make up to Lady Leigh for the great sorrow of her life, and so trusts her like a little child."

"It's no canny, my bairn, and she must aye hae been but a silly body, at the best; sae gang on wi' the rest, though she be the grandest leddy there."

"Then there is Lord Erlscourt, and his two brothers."

"I'll aye hae to pit on a' my best claithes. Them is folk now, and I maun tell the doctor to hae his finest wits about him."

"Are you afraid of Laird Erlscourt, Mrs. Laird?"

"Na, na, bairn, but we maun aye pay respect to our betters."

"But you would not put on your best gown for Lady Katherine."

"Hoot, bairn! you're no wise the morn. Div ye no see the differ atween a man like my Laird Erlscourt and thon? I'm thinking there ne'er was a body like him for sense and goodness, whether he is a laird, or no but a common mon, like my doctor. Ay, me! but I'll pit on my cap o' Limerick lace. And wha else, ye bit thing?"

"There will be Mr. Frank, and Mrs. Frank."

"Ay! them's nice people, heartsome folk; and though she's a bit, joost ye ken, stiff like, I'm thinking it's muir shyness than pride. And they bit bonnie twins. Nae wonder to see their father doighted about them."

"But the twins won't dine with us."

"Come, come, nane o' yer clavers; ye mak nae jokes o' me, ye bit mischief! I'll be axing ye next if Bear is to be at the banquet. And wha else div ye expect?"

"There will be two of my brothers, and some more of my people ——"

"The mair the better, say I," interrupted Mrs. Laird.

"And Miss Leigh, and Mr. Grey, and Rachel ——"

"Ay, my word, to think of ye being such a match-maker. They tell me, as you telled that puir, silly body, Lady Katherine, it wad be a guid thing did her and him marry. And she said 'Ay,' at the first word."

"Don't you think it will be a nice thing for all parties?"

"I see nothing agin it, more belike, if they dinna mak up their minds soon, they maun just let it be. They're no sae young. And hae ye any ither body coming?"

"Yes, there are a Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, who came unexpectedly last night without an invitation. But we think they will not stay very long."

"I aye like to see new folks, but I dinna think I'll get fond of them. I never heard ye say their names afore, so I'm speering that they'll be no just what me and Alick will cotton to."

"O! Mrs. Laird, don't be prejudiced; you will find Mrs. Bankes a very chatty, lively woman; and Mr. Bankes very gentlemanly and quiet. But I must go now, or I shall be late for breakfast."

"Weel, gang awa wi' ye. I ken by yer een them new folks is naething to ye, and yer having yer fun o' me. But here, tak a present fra' the doctor and me. Could we gie ye what we wish, it wad be a' we had, and oursels besides, ye bit, bonny, lovesome thing!"

And Mrs. Laird kissed the rosy face again and again, until Bear got frightfully jealous, and walked off sulking, with his tail between his legs.

Who was shortly after met by Basil; and though both knew Lotty was but two steps behind, yet they took no notice of her, but talked to each other, as if Basil was as much accustomed to confide his thoughts to Bear as ever Lotty was.

"So! Bear, little Lotty has offended you, has she?"

"I wish you would not call me little Lotty, Basil; it really is not proper," said Lotty from behind.

"But she is very little, is she not, Bear?" said Basil, going on as if not hearing her. "So we must put up with a great deal of nonsense in her, because she is so."

"Nonsense, indeed!" said the voice behind.

"And we both know that, though so little, she is very well-meaning in all she says and does. Eh, Bear?"

"Much obliged for such an opinion," from behind.

"And considering that she is only nineteen years old to-day, Bear, we must not expect her to be so wise as we are. When she is about forty, perhaps we may see her grave and serious like us."

"Ha! indeed!" from behind.

"In the mean time, Bear, supposing she should be what Mrs. Laird says, a myth, a fairy angel strayed away, and that she should suddenly fly off and leave us. What would Lady Katherine do? Go after her, Bear, I think, as fast as she could hobble. And gentle Pru.? and warm-hearted Pro.? why, I think they would run after her also, with a little twin girl in each arm, Then Mr. and Mrs. Laird, Mr. Grey, and all the Beauvillians, flying the same way."

"How absurd you are this morning, Basil!" said the voice behind.

"But as for Queen Margaret, Bear, little Lotty could not slip away without telling her where to follow. And if Queen Margaret remained behind, we should have the little myth back again. So you and I, Bear, will ever keep by Queen Margaret's side, then shall we be sure of seeing that little wild Lotty."

"Not so sure as you think," was heard in a very sulky voice. "And I always thought you so sensible, Basil."

"We never can be sensible when Lotty is near, can we, Bear? she is so ——"

"Come, Bear, come to me; you are hearing very foolish things, and must listen no longer."

"Ah, Lotty, how strange of you to be a listener! Now it is one of the last things I should have supposed you ——"

"Pray don't suppose any more things about me, Lord Erlscourt."

"O! we are proud, are we?"

"That is better than being silly."

"How can one help it on such a day? I rose up intoxicated with joy, and seeing a fairy footfall on the fresh snow, I came in pursuit. And I was merely following your example, confiding my feelings to Bear."

"That reminds me, I really wish to know, Basil, how you, of whom I always held so high an opinion, could be so mean as to listen to a private conversation?"

"I did not mean to be so mean, I assure you; but I thought the first time I fell into the snare, that you were talking to me. Upon hearing the name of Bear, I immediately departed, not to intrude on a *tête-à-tête*."

"And may I ask what you did hear?"

"I agreed in one opinion very strongly, and whether to admire you or Bear most I did not know. You said you would not be Flo., and Bear said he would not be Carry. Ah, Lotty, my sweet, dear Lotty! I did not mean to vex you; don't you know that I think ——"

"I do not care what you think!" as passionate tears burst from her eyes.

"Then, upon my honor, I heard no more than that, Lotty, and it was quite accidental; and, much as I was pleased with the conceit of the thing, I honorably went away."

"Why did you not say so at once, Basil?"

"Because I am such a weak, foolish fellow. I enjoyed seeing you put out."

"Then you shall have no such enjoyment again."

"Sweet Lotty! tell me with your truthful eyes that you are not really offended. I followed you out, that I might be the first to give you the best wishes of the day, that I might make you my little present, and apart from the crowd of birthday gifts that I know are to be showered upon you. Will you forgive me? — will you accept it?"

"If a man chooses to be silly, why am I to forgive him? I have nothing to forgive. But Mrs. Laird gave me my first congratulations and present."

"Do let me see it," said Basil, with boyish curiosity; "if it is prettier than mine, I'll send to London for another."

They opened the parcel between them, and discovered a small scarf of exquisite old point-lace, which looked as if an industrious spider had spent her whole life in spinning it.

"Ah!" said Lotty, "it is the prettiest; it will be. Basil, you can have nothing so lovely as this!"

"Lovely, indeed! It looks to me like very irregular old cobwebs; and it is not even washed yet."

"Ah, Basil! you are just like all gentlemen; you know nothing about women's dress. Mrs. Laird must have known I was so fond of old lace, and this will do to throw over my curls when Lady Katherine comes, as she is shocked to see me without a cap."

"For Heaven's sake, no!" exclaimed Basil. "Why should you go mourning about the world, as if you had lost your first love — your husband? It is all very well for Margaret."

"Basil, I think you don't quite know what you are saying."

"I believe you are right; but don't wrap up your curls; — besides, the year is out for what people call weeds."

"Wrap up my curls! — as if they were parcels, or newspapers to be sent off! But where is your present? I am sure you are ashamed of it, and cannot show it after Mrs. Laird's."

"Mine is quite in a different style; and, besides, I have taken a great deal of trouble about it. I wanted to match something, and all over London I could find nothing in art or nature to equal them."

"Whose were they, and what are they?"

"They are two eyes, and in your possession," said Basil.

"Ah! I dare say, now, you have brought me a set of buttons made of cat's-eye pebbles. Hideous!—I won't accept them!"

"They are not cat's-eye pebbles, and they are not buttons."

"Then they are great staring carbuncles."

"Which, you know, I suppose, would just match your eyes, little Lotty."

"Don't Basil; I am nineteen to-day."

"Then, Lotty, take my present, and, with it, more good wishes than I care to own. For Mrs. Bankes is just drawing the curtains of her bed-room window—and she will, perhaps, tell tales of us at breakfast."

"Pray, why should I not walk with whom I please," said Lotty, "without asking Mrs. Bankes?"

"Bear would not be Flo., and you ——"

"Bear, Bear, bite him!" But he and Bear went off together in a frolicsome mood.

Lotty opened Basil's present, with some curiosity certainly, and much pleasure that he had remembered her.

She drew forth from the pink cotton in which they were enveloped, a fairy little pair of gold manacles. As she turned them round, her eyes were quite dazzled with the splendor of a single diamond on each, beneath which was the fastening. So large, so brilliant, so perfect in shape and water, almost alone in their slight, simple setting, Lotty held them before her in wonder and admiration, and as they reflected back her own eyes, she blushed at the remembrance of his words.

"My eyes, indeed! who could have thought that Basil would have been so foolish as to spend such a fortune as he must have done on these diamonds, just because of my eyes? Shall I make him take them back? No; I will tell him he is very silly, and I will wear them until there is a Lady Erlscourt, and then she shall have them. They will look lovely on —— Ah, well! I will say nothing!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

It was very true that Mrs. Bankes had, unasked, unwished for, thrust herself once more into Court Leigh. She was a prey to most ungovernable curiosity, as to how matters were going on there, since the extraordinary change in all their fates; and finding that she was likely to receive no positive invitation, with an unabashed coolness, she gave herself and her dear Frederick an invitation of her own accord.

Margaret was too amiable, and too well-bred, to turn her from her door, as it might be said. And though, in her gentle, grief-stricken heart she might fancy that Mrs. Bankes showed a great want of delicate feeling in thus thrusting her society upon one who must be painfully reminded of all that occurred on her former visit, that heart was too well schooled in adversity and sorrow to bend before a Mrs. Bankes's annoyances. So there she was settled, as she assured her dear Frederick, in conjugal talk at night, just as if she was at home. "I knew it would be the case, the moment they saw me, 'out of sight out of mind;' moping and pining over their griefs and sorrows, naturally they would think that no one would like to come and be with them. However, they little knew me — I am always ready to give my advice and company, where I can see they will be of real use, and I shall begin, the first thing in the morning, to look about me, and see what I can do; I shall think it is only my duty. Margaret was but a poor thing when we were here before, but positively she is a spectre now; and what caps! her face looks like nothing in them, and only that line of hair. Now, my dear Fred., if I am to be so unfortunate as to lose you, I should make a point of having a cap of the very first milliner, in style and everything; though you may suppose, Fred., that a widow's cap is nothing but a bit of muslin, you are mistaken. Some are made of lawn, with broad sorts of streamers down each side, very ugly to look at, and always in the way. Some are made of — Why, Fred.! Fred.! — I declare he is asleep; I never saw such a fellow to sleep; I don't think he can be well, so I must dose him to-morrow; that snore sounds very bilious. However, I will go to sleep myself now, for I have a great deal to do to-morrow, looking about me. We have got Lady Montagu's room I find. Well! it is very handsome and comfortable, and I am glad to see Margaret does not neglect her mother — some people are so selfish in their sorrow, and it is lucky the old lady had gone home for a while, as, perhaps, they would have had no room for us, and that would have been a pretty kettle of fish, after all my trouble in dragging Fred. down. That certainly is a bilious snore." However, here — like Mrs. Caudle, of Punch memory — Mrs. Bankes fell asleep, and was undrawing her curtains, just as Basil said, on the morning of Lotty's birthday.

No one appeared at breakfast that morning without a present for Lotty, excepting Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, and apparently Lord Erlscourt. Young Harold brought a silver chain, with a plate and name on it, for Bear, who seemed more surprised than pleased with his necklace. The little Lottina toddled in with a small riding-whip of exquisite workmanship and fairy proportions.

The two Erle boys, not thinking that money could buy aught handsome enough for Mrs. Leigh, had endeavored to make their presents valuable from the labor bestowed thereon.

Therefore one brought her the model of a steam-engine, made by himself, at infinite wear and tear of his nerves and temper during the process, that it might indeed prove worthy of the person on whom it was bestowed. And as he had no idea of all this trouble being taken for nothing, he had ingeniously made his steam-engine the vehicle for holding different scents, all of which, by some extraordinary contrivance, came out of the same spout, yet remained pure and uncontaminated by each other. The other presented her with a collection of eggs of British birds, each set of eggs in its own nest, beautifully arranged and classified, and encased by himself; the collection was really both valuable and curious. Besides which, they each gave her a young Pinus deodarus, raised from seed by themselves, and which were planted that day with due honor at High Leigh, thereby costing Mrs. Laird a whole bottle of ginger wine, and an entire baking of short bread, neither of which she begrudged. Mr. and Mrs. Frank's present was jointly given — a rare and costly set of chess-men, seemingly carved solely for the long taper nails of the Empress of China.

"Ah!" sighed Lotty, as she gazed on them, "I shall always lose now, when I play with these beautiful chess-men. I shall do nothing but admire them, and wonder how they could have been so deftly carved."

The twins carried in each hand — being themselves each carried in their turn by a maid — a bunch of violets. And Margaret covered her Lotty with roses as her present, having given secret orders, months before, to have some forced on purpose; and Lotty looked like a little Queen-rose among them.

"It is all very well, Lord Erlscourt, giving presents now and then," said Mrs. Bankes, "but I see you have made no offering; neither have I nor dear Frederick — we do not quite approve of such things, because it leads to a sort of jealousy, you know; one does not give as handsome a present as the other. Look now at the difference between Margaret's roses and the chess-men. Lotty had only to wait until summer, and she might smother herself in roses. But I suppose the Leigh estates are still much embarrassed: I conclude Margaret could afford no more."

"A rose, Mrs. Bankes, especially out of season, has been valued at a much higher price than you seem to think its due."

"Ah! yes, some of those new roses; for instance, what sums were paid for Géant de Bataille."

"And don't you remember that story of 'Beauty and the Beast'? there, if I mistake not, a rose is valued at a life."

"You joke, my lord; but what is Lotty showing now? Bracelets! upon my word, those really now seem a pretty little present; very tasty and fashionable. Do let me look at them. Jupiter Ammon! my dear, what diamonds! Fred., Fred., come here; did you ever! Heavens! child, they are worth millions of money! Where did you get them? Who gave them to you?"

"I found them this morning."

"Found them, my dear! Are you sure they are for you? Had you no note?"

"Yes; they were in a parcel directed to me, and this note inside."

"Let me see! let me see!" exclaimed Flo.

TO LOTTY'S EYES.

I've sought in vain to find a gem
  To match those radiant ones of thine.
Ah! Lotty, who that looks on them,
  Will deign to cast one glance on mine?

'Tis as the glowworm's feeble light
  To yon bright stars that gem the skies.
Lotty, my life is as the night;
  Lighten it, starlike, with thine eyes.

"Upon my word, pretty thoughts indeed: 'Tis almost as good as an offer of marriage; and I am sure only a prince of the blood could afford such a present. You are lucky! my dear."

"If the donor appears and declares that he means what he says, ought Mrs. Leigh to accept his offer?" asked Lord Erlscourt.

"Of course she ought. She may be sure he must be monstrous rich and generous," answered Mrs. Bankes.

"The donor shall know my mind when he wishes it, and I shall not have much trouble in telling him he is a very great goose for his pains." Thus savagely growled the little Bear, with angry, sparkling eyes, and red-rose cheeks.

Mrs. Bankes's retort was smothered by the entrance of Mr. Grey, the bearer of more presents. An antique brooch from Lady Katherine, with a rare pearl in the centre, that lay conscious and blushing at its own beauty; an embroidered *sachet de mouchoirs* from Pru., the work of her own diligent fingers; and from Mr. Grey himself some books on botany.

* * * * * *

When all the excitement regarding Lotty's presents had somewhat subsided, the ever-busy Florence, looking round to see in what manner she could employ herself with satisfaction, was delighted to catch sight of Mr. Grey, drawing Lady Leigh confidentially aside. Humming an indifferent sort of nothing-may-care tune, she placed herself, as by chance, sufficiently close to hear the interesting communication; and, we presume, could not but be edified thereby.

"I am very much obliged to you, Lady Leigh, and trust my wishes may not have proved in this instance as running counter to my better judgment."

"Dear me!" said the listener to herself.

"I am sure of the contrary, John," said Lady Leigh, "and am glad to do as you wish, if it were only to please myself."

"My good gracious! who would have thought it?" said the listener, almost aloud, in her amazement.

"They have suffered very severely, through all the winter months, for want of regular employment, and, really, with natures like the Jones's, so prone to evil, starvation might lead them to crime."

"Law! parish stuff!" said the disappointed hearer.

"I did not think it right to bind them down to any promise, but only said they should have constant work for a time; I think by this means we shall make their condition so very much better that they will experience the virtue of gratitude at least; and if they work, they cannot be in mischief. But I have one thing to propose, Lady Leigh, as binding them yet more strongly to you."

"What is that, John?"

"If you would go sometimes and visit the new cottage they are to build, as if interested in its erection, and by this means get into conversation with them, I think, after a time, you might propose giving half the money they will earn weekly, to their wives."

"Bless the man!" said the listener; "does he think to make Lady Leigh entice common masons to do their duty, and to talk to them?"

"Willingly, dear John! I understand exactly what you mean," said Lady Leigh.

"Dear John! I suppose then they must be engaged. I shall go and question Lotty when they finish."

"It seems to me likely, that if you take an interest in these unhappy men and their families, they will experience a new and delightful feeling. They have been so long the objects of contempt and opprobrium, kindness, or, at all events, interest in them, will awaken better feelings."

"And even supposing your good thought does not succeed, John, we shall at least know that we drove them by no unkindness to greater evil."

"True. To-morrow, I believe, I am to expect you at the school. I suppose, in rewarding the children after the examination, uniform propriety of conduct is to have greater praise than any individual quantity of learning or assiduity. I find the little things are much more particular and amiable in their manners to each other, since you gave Amy Wilcox, that pale, meek child, the first prize for attention to her little sister, and that great dunce, Joseph Ewins, for his care of his grandmother. And they seem to know that I keep a pretty keen lookout after all their delinquencies."

"They have not to learn those long Scripture lessons by heart now, which is a very good thing," said Lady Leigh. "I could not bear to hear those holy words gabbled and stumbled over, like a common lesson."

"I think it has had a good effect not doing so; they seem much more interested in the Bible now, and really try to understand it, instead of only repeating the words like empty-headed parrots."

"Do you think that poor girl will recover, down at Burnleigh?"

"A great and horrible weight seems taken off her mind. Her parents naturally were very much shocked and disgusted, that a daughter of theirs should have thus disgraced herself; and I, by no means, wish them to think or act otherwise. Her sin is far too common and uncared-for, in this country, for us to deal otherwise than strongly by it. Nevertheless, under the heavy displeasure of her parents, the unfeeling conduct of her sister, whatever promptings of remorse and contrition she had, were being smothered. Miss Rachel luckily found the way into that sin-laden heart, and once removed from home and country, with the power to retrieve her good name, we may hope to 'save this soul alive.'"

"Such a hope is worth any trial. God bestows on us daily opportunities of repentance and amendment. It is fit we do the same by our erring fellow-mortals," answered the gentle Margaret.

And now there flushed over John Grey's face a glow so peculiar and satisfactory, that Flo. became more intent than ever.

"My happy day is fixed," said he.

"Yes," answered Margaret, half smiling, half murmuring, "Easter-Tuesday, dear John; you will now be identified with us, both in weal and woe."

"I must have been so without this happiness. Believe me, owing this blessing as I do, solely to you, — for your sacred command, 'Be my mother's son,' pointed out that my inclination was scarcely more strong than my duty, — the home, the world, the love, the welfare of the Leighs, must ever have been mine."

"My goodness me! where is Lotty?" and Mrs. Bankes, in her hurry to find her, left the rest of this interesting conversation to be heard only by the ears intended for it.

"Lotty, Lotty! what is this I hear?"

"I do not know, Flo., as you may have heard what I have not."

"O! you may look as demure as you like," continued Mrs. Bankes, winking violently. "None so deaf as those who won't hear."

"Not having heard yet, I presume you have no reference to me," answered Lotty.

"Then, my dear, since you are so discreet, allow me to ask how long Mr. Grey has been such a prodigious favorite here?"

"Ever since he came, Flo."

"Dear me! Well, I must say, I should not have thought it. Margaret seemed to me as if she would have been constant for two years at least. Now with you, my dear Lotty, if you had married the next month, I should have thought it no more than your duty."

"What a pity it is I can get no one to have me!"

"O, but you may, my dear — don't despair; and you with such a good jointure, too. There is a cousin of mine —— "

"What! the red-haired one — no, I thank you; I'll endure my lonely state as well as I can, rather than that."

Well, my dear, that is according to taste. Everybody says he is very like Fred.; and when one comes to think what you endured from that dark, gloomy man — ah! my dear, they say such things of him —— "

" Then they who say, seem indifferent to truth."

" Come, Lotty, don't be angry with your old schoolfellow and friend. I know he behaved very ill to you; come, now, tell me all about it."

" You seem better informed than I am."

" Then, my dear, I'll just tell you all I heard, and you will be able to assure me if it's true."

" You had better make no remarks upon Philip Leigh before Bear, unless they are strictly true. Come here, Bear. What do you do when people tell fibs?"

Bear made such an exhibition of frantic rage that Mrs. Bankes fled in a panic.

* * * * * *

The banquet, as Mrs. Laird persisted in calling it, was superb. Margaret did not appear in such large parties at the head of her table, but was seated at the side, by her dear Lotty. Lady Katherine presided, with John Grey as vice-president. The gentle Pru. was undergoing a course of teasing from the Erle boys, on the subject of love and lovers, and she must not eat that, nor partake of the other, or touch anything inflammable, which amused Mrs. Bankes greatly; and she said to herself, " Poor old thing! I should not wonder but she thinks them in earnest."

John, however, guarded his Pru. so well, she became quite merry and lively, with all their fun.

So Mrs. Bankes again said to herself, —

" Bless the old thing! She will be thinking that man in love with her."

The children appeared with the fruit before the ladies had retired. The beautiful young Harold drew towards his mother, with all his loving heart in his eyes; while the little rosy, blooming Lottina made such a noise on her godmother's knee, they were very nearly both being sent to bed. The little quiet twins looked on with awe and wonder at this noise; their fair little faces, and upright, stiff little figures, making them appear as miniatures of Pru. and Pro. But Mr. Frank lost himself in a sea of admiration at their loveliness; and all the Beauvillians declared, though they were unlike " the girl," the original girl, they were quite gems of girls.

After dinner, Mrs. Bankes having been conjecturing how an ordinary sort of man, whose wig got pushed all on one side from excitement, had been admitted, together with his wife, who spoke the broadest Scotch, and was always speaking too, seated herself beside the offending person, to find out what she could about her.

"That is a very handsome dress, ma'am," began Mrs. Bankes.

"Yer welcome to admire it," said Mrs. Laird, getting all her armor ready. She had seen quite enough of Mrs. Bankes at dinner to determine how to act.

"So you know me. I am not so fortunate as to surmise who you are."

"I am Mistress Laird, the doctor's wife, and we live at High Leigh; and I was born a Macullam; and I bought my dress in Glasgaw; and the price of it, and the length on it, is down i' the bill."

"Really, Mrs. Laird, you must not suppose that I am of a prying, meddling disposition. No one was ever so free from such vices."

"Mistress Bankes, I am glad to hear it."

"I hope you will allow me to admire your cap, without thinking I wish to know all the particulars thereof."

Not that Mrs. Bankes really admired either cap or dress, for the latter was of a striking tartan, and, being satin in texture, shone out with unblushing glory; while the lace cap might have been pretty, had it not been favored with bows of a peculiar make, size, and color, that gave Mrs. Laird's marked Scotch features the appearance of being newly done up to sit for a signboard of blessed Queen Anne. But she thought admiration a notable way of learning a person's weak points.

"I hae no objection, ma'am, to tell ye that the cap was a present from one o' Mrs. Leigh's uncles, so I am no like to ken the price."

"But how did you know him?"

"Ay, that's it; that maks a' the differ, as the doctor says, when a patient's mending or worsing."

"O! there is a mystery about it, is there?"

"May be there is, and may be there isn't."

"Are you the lady who was kind to Mrs. Leigh, when her brute of a husband behaved so ill to her?"

"The Lord save us! — and is that the way to speak o' a puir dead mon, who ne'er hurted ye? Eh, Mistress Bankes! div ye no fear a curse on ye?"

"I am not at all superstitious, I can assure you. I always speak of people as I find them."

"Then if you was to the fore, there's nae need for me to tell ma news."

"But if you have any news, I shall be very glad to hear it, for I am so much interested about dear little Lotty, that, though I never make or meddle in other people's matters, it is a point with me to enter into all her concerns."

"Very ceevil, I am sure. Ye hae nae family o' yer own, may be?"

"No; but why ask that?"

"When a body has naething to entertain them at hame, they are aye rinning after ither folks' matters. I find it mysel'; but then, ye see, I hae a fine, sensible mon to ma husband, and your little mon, he seems aye very sweet o' the platter and jug; but I am misdoubting ye are his master."

Pocketing the insult to her dear Fred., on account of the implied compliment to her own sense, Mrs. Bankes got interested in a further debate.

"And about Philip Leigh?"

"What aboun a dead man?"

"I have heard it said that he behaved very ill indeed to his wife."

"Ech me, what one hears nooadays!"

"Then it's not true?"

"Hae ye axed Mrs. Leigh?"

"Yes, I have; but she won't say anything."

"And she wunna tell ye naething?"

"No, not a word, though I am dying of curiosity, and shall be most thankful to you if you will give me every information in your power."

"What for, Mistress Bankes?"

"O! for no particular reason. I shall, of course, tell no one; but, having my own suspicions, I shall be delighted to find I was correct."

"And what do ye ca' unkind?"

"Why, scolding her. I have heard he beat her, and gambled away his money, and all sorts of things."

"Weel, Mistress Bankes, they lived at our house ganging on for sax weeks, and during a' that time he never said a cross word till her; but he loved the air she stood in, the chair she sat in, the cup she touched, and he died in her arms at last, saying he was happy to gang that way."

"Dear, how odd! I concluded it was so different. But here are the gentlemen. Are you not shocked, Mrs. Laird, to see how dreadfully Lady Leigh flirts with Mr. Grey?"

"What div ye think 'ill come on it?"

"I suppose she'll marry him; and her husband, that she idolized so, hardly dead a year."

"I hae reason to think she wunna."

"Why, why? have you seen or heard anything?"

"Ay; I hae seen him walking with Miss Leigh, and I hae heard Lady Katherine give them the blessing as man and wife."

"O, nonsense! I'll never believe it! You are mistaken! You don't know what I overheard this morning. Lady Leigh called him 'dear John' — she spoke about a cottage — and what was that but love in a cottage?"

"Weel, weel; hae it yer ain way. May be ye'll lend me yer little mon to run awa' wi' next. Never fear, but ye shall hae him back, wrapped in a cambric handkercher."

Mrs. Bankes left Mrs. Laird's side, with an uncomfortable feeling that she had not had the last word.

"Very strange woman that, my dear Lotty. I am surprised Margaret asked her to meet such company."

"Margaret did not ask her — I did."

"I don't think, then, my dear, you acted with the judgment I really thought you possessed, under all your childish ways. Besides being very much out of place in her *outré* dress and cap, she talks such broad Scotch, and has no idea of right and wrong. I convicted her in such a fib ——"

"A fib!" said Lotty.

"Yes, my dear. She told me just as coolly as if I was a bit of cucumber and she the vinegar, that Mr. Grey was going to be married to Miss Leigh. God bless the man that gets her! say I, for she is the most regular old maid I ever saw. Little did Mrs. Laird know what I overheard this morning between Mr. Grey and Margaret. Quite by accident, I heard them settling their plans, and she called him 'my John.' I must say I never would have believed it of Margaret — never!"

"I don't see why you need believe it now, Flo."

"Ah, my dear, you are an innocent, well-meaning girl, and without saying much, I dare say you feel a great deal. And I am certain you would never pay your husband so bad a compliment as to be ready to jump down the throat of the first man that offered."

"I should say it was a compliment to my first husband, and showed I was anxious to be as happy again as he made me."

"Pooh, child! you must not joke on such serious subjects. You are under my care and advice, and well it is for you that you are; for with this frightful example of Margaret's before you, with all her ridiculous show — here are the gentlemen, so no more. My gracious! how red Fred. is in the face — I hope he has not been taking too much wine. How handsome Lord Erlscourt is! — really — I suppose that's what makes Fred. look rather, that is, not quite so handsome as usual. What a beautiful smile he has! Ah, my dear! if Margaret had now only fallen in love with him, instead of that humdrum clergyman, we must have made allowances for her. He bends over her chair so gracefully."

"The humdrum ——"

"No, you stupid thing! and she has quite brightened up with some lively remark he has made. Ah! Margaret, too late you'll discover what a goose you have been. I see such a distressing state of things for the future."

"'Let not ills that never hap, chiefly make thee wretched,' saith Tupper."

"My dear, nonsense with your Tupper! I never make nor — Ah! here is Lord Erlscourt looking my way; yes, he is coming towards us; so, Lotty, dear, if you have anything to say to any one, pray don't think it necessary to remain and entertain me."

"I can assure you, Flo., the entertainment is all on the other side."

"Well, people do say I am the most agreeable woman they ever met, and I am sure I don't know why it is so, for I never entertain company at other people's expense — but go, my dear, here he is."

Mrs. Bankes was thinking so much of how she should bring to bear the full battery of all her agreeable powers upon Lord Erlscourt, that she did not perceive his look of disappointment at Lotty's retreat. How he shook his head deprecatingly at her, and how Lotty laughed back a laugh of spiteful amusement, at his being caught in the clutches of Mrs. Bankes! Determining to cut it as short as possible, he set himself to submit with as good a grace as he could.

"Well, my Lord, I am so delighted you have come, because I feel a little out of place here, and you being in the same situation, we can comfort each other."

"I feel remarkably happy, thank you, Mrs. Bankes, and do not feel at all as if I was in the way."

"Of course, my lord, I do not mean in the way, but they are all so nearly related and connected with each other, that we seem the only two strangers."

"I could not have supposed a person so amiable as Mrs. Bankes, had forgotten the existence of Mr. Bankes."

"O! of course I included Fred.; but you see there is that Mr. Grey going to become one of the family."

"True."

"O! then you have been told; otherwise I was going to mention to you a little circumstance I heard this morning quite by accident. They were talking in the window, and she called him her beloved John, and they talked about settlements."

"They seem to have had an eye to business as well as love, Mrs. Bankes."

"Ah! yes, that is generally the case with widows."

"Widows!" exclaimed Lord Erlscourt.

"Yes, of course, are we not talking of Lady Leigh and Mr. Grey?"

"O! we are, are we? have you congratulated her yet? I think she would only consider it kind of an old schoolfellow; and if you will excuse me while you perform this friendly matter, I wish to tell Mrs. Leigh that I think Dr. Laird must have given her those bracelets."

"I dare say he did, and they are nothing but Scotch diamonds after all."

"Paste, I should say, Mrs. Banks."

"No doubt, just like a doctor's taste."

"Basil, where have you sent Mrs. Bankes?" said Lotty, as he passed on to her.

"I know where I should like to send her," said Basil; "but at present I have despatched her to congratulate Margaret upon her intended nuptials with Mr. Grey."

"O Basil! how could you be so mischievous?"

"Not at all; Margaret's answer will rebuke her more than anything we can say. Ha! Lotty, look, she has begun; see Margaret's face, first astonishment, then calm, dignified contempt. With what queenlike grace she rises and touches John Grey's arm! I will stake the next kiss you give me, that ——"

"Don't stake what you have not, Basil."

"That Margaret has not answered her a word, but has taken John Grey up to introduce him, and said, 'Mrs. Bankes wishes to offer you her congratulations on your intended marriage with Miss Leigh.' Don't you perceive how mortified she looks, Lotty?"

"Don't you think Lord Erlscourt is very rude to me, Mrs. Laird?" said Lotty, falling back to the shelter of the brilliant plaid satin dress.

"To luik at his een, my bairn, I see pratty much what a' on us feel, and that's nae rudeness."

"Quite true, Mrs. Laird; I never can persuade Lotty that it is all love on my part," said Lord Erlscourt.

Mrs. Laird turned upon him the full battery of her shrewd Scotch eyes; then, as if the scrutiny was satisfactory, she placed her hand fondly on Lotty, saying "May ye niver hae mair rudeness than my laird's, my bairn."

"If you take his side, I leave you," answered Lotty, crossing over to Rachel Clare.

"Weel, my laird, I am thinking, like us a', yer aye fond of that bonny bairn."

"'Fond' is not quite the proper expression for me, Mrs. Laird. Some of these days I'll prove my real opinion of her. But, alas! Mrs. Bankes seems returning."

"Ech! my word, what a daft body thon is."

"You and my brothers agree."

"Aye, but I am glad I'm in sich company. Them's twa grand boys, and I'll gang and hae a clack wi' em, about yon fulish body, just to ease my mind."

"May I come some morning, and sit with you? Believe me actuated by no unworthy motive, if I question you about poor Philip Leigh."

"Deed wunnot I. The doctor and me will be aye glad to let on till a friend abune him, and a' that little angel thing suffered. For she wull never tell, and naebody kens a' I kens about the bonny thing. She's joost made of the Almighty's best handywork. But here's thon daft body."

"My lord, how could you ——" began Mrs. Bankes.

"I beg your pardon — pray excuse me — Lady Leigh calls me," answered Basil, hastily departing.

"Mrs. Laird, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to deceive me thus," said Flo. to her.

"My guid woman, shame and Janet Laird never sat together yet. Tak yer ain blame on yer ain head, or may be's I'll get my doctor to gie ye his mind."

"Good woman, indeed!"

"Hey! may be I mistook there;" and Mrs. Laird moved off, grimly smiling at her own wit.

CHAPTER LXV.

"I WISH, Basil," said Lotty, as she met him, when returning on the morrow from her morning's walk, "you would take back those diamonds; they ought to be heirlooms, or something of that sort."

"So I mean them to be," said Basil; "but don't plume yourself upon thinking they are diamonds — Mrs. Bankes says they are paste."

"She is very angry with me about John Grey, and said I wilfully deceived her, Basil; and that you also are a victim to my mischievous temper."

"I am a victim to you, Lotty, but not in that way."

"I am not in any humor for nonsense, Basil, so pray talk common sense. One would suppose you were one of the boys. And how happens it that you have taken such a restless turn? I never knew you take these early walks before."

"That shows how little you are interested in my movements — for I always take early walks; but lately you seem continually to have stumbled on my path."

"Why do you not ask the servants which road I take?"

"So I do, Lotty."

"Then, Basil, you follow me on purpose."

"Without any doubt. Do you dislike my company?"

"No, not at all; but you should be Basil, not a ——"

"Not a fool, Lotty."

"I did not say so; but, come now, will you take those bracelets back?"

"No, certainly not."

"Then I will wear them on one condition, that when there is a young Lady Erlscourt, I may present them to her."

"That depends upon what sort of arm she has. She may weigh twenty stone, Lotty."

"That you may be certain she will not do, Basil; but why did you have them made so small?"

"To fit this tiny wrist," answered Basil, taking her hand in his.

"It is very easy to have more links added, if she should weigh twenty stone," said Lotty, withdrawing it.

"I agree with you, that she will not weigh so much — more likely twenty pounds; so I close with your proposal."

"Thank you, Basil; now I shall wear them in peace and comfort, just as if they were my own."

"Long may you continue to think they are your own, Lotty."

"Nay, Basil, not so. I do not know of any one who ought to have a perfect wife so much as you."

"I quite agree, Lotty. But will a perfect wife, such as I want, have me?"

"Ah, Basil, you are, indeed, very strange: knowing as you must know what I know, how can you be so ambiguous and foolish?"

"Ah, Bear, come here, and resolve me of this sentence: 'knowing as you must know what I know,' and I asked a straightforward question, Bear; who is most ambiguous, old fellow?"

"Then, Basil, Margaret. Does she not look almost like her old self? Now that poor Harold's name is cleared, thanks to your exertions, she seems to have given him calmly up to God, and is only bent on fulfilling his earthly duties."

"Lotty, Margaret has realized every hope I had entertained of her character. And, perhaps, had she not had these trials, we should not have seen the full beauty and strength of it. She has risen superior to even the idol that I had formed of her in my heart, when I loved her so madly."

"Loved her, Basil! Do you not love her now?"

"Yes, as the angels love."

"Wherefore thus, Basil? Are not her trials over? Will you not guard her future life? Will you not make amends to her for all she has endured?"

"Yes, Lotty, as a brother."

"No more, Basil?"

"No, Lotty, I cannot."

"Then farewell to my last scheme of match-making. Yet, why is it so, Basil? she is more worthy of your love than before."

"Granted, Lotty, doubly granted. But we men, calling ourselves your superiors in all things, must bow the knee before the true and constant affection of a woman's heart. I am faithless; I almost think I love another."

"Then I shall hate that other, Basil."

"Hate her as much as you please, Lotty, provided she makes me happy."

"You are selfish, Basil. Like Flo., I will neither make nor meddle in your matters."

"Nay, Lotty, grant me your best wishes, at all events; for the heart I wish to win is so pure, so true, so noble, that did it not love me with all its powers, I know I should be rejected on the spot."

"Then take my best wishes, since she seems so worthy of you; but, for goodness' sake! let me hear no more of the matter."

"Lotty, do not be angry. Come, we will talk of something else. I like your Mrs. Laird very much. She told me long stories about you."

"She might have employed her time better."

"Lotty, you must have suffered much."

"I suffer nothing now."

"When I loved you so, Lotty, as the fearless, warm-hearted child, I did not think you were something much beyond; a lesson to us all, an example in every way."

"Good-by!" said Lotty; "you take me for a baby still, I see."

She ran away; and Basil went to join his brothers, who were at a little distance, practising jumping over a leaping-bar.

"We would not come and disturb you, Basil, because you were walking with Mrs. Leigh," said Brian.

"And why did that prevent you? I thought she was such a favorite of yours."

"So she is," said both the boys; "but as we said to each other, when we saw you, if we walked alone with Mrs. Leigh, we should certainly tell her how much we loved her, so we thought you could not help doing so also."

"You are quite right; I did."

"And what did she say? O! Basil, did she say she would marry you — be our sister? I'll kiss her every day then."

"Stop, stop, boys; not so fast. I may not allow that."

"Once a week then, dear Basil."

"Well, perhaps once a week I may; but there is one great impediment. She would not hear me — she ran away, as you saw just now."

The two boys groaned. And all breakfast-time they sat sorrowful and silent, and ate very little, which was not at all their usual custom.

In vain Mrs. Bankes cheered them up, in her usual rather vulgar style, by affectionate slaps on the back, and incessant friendly winks; they remained plunged in deep sorrow, and never looked at Lotty without further sighs. So Mrs. Bankes began to foresee various strange things, and opened her eyes accordingly. Before breakfast was finished, she had come to the conclusion that both the Erle boys, not being so much younger than Lotty, were deeply in love with her, and that they would probably have a deadly quarrel; and that Lord Erlscourt was making up to Lady Leigh himself. He had put two pats of butter on her plate unknowingly, and twice slipped out the word "Margaret." She would take the earliest opportunity of informing Lotty of this state of affairs.

CHAPTER LXVI.

"So, Lotty, I see which way the wind lies; you and Margaret will be sisters after all," said Mrs. Bankes.

"You are very kind to manage it so, Flo."

"Not at all; I live for nothing so much as to oblige my friends. Unlike Carry —— By-the-bye, have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, last summer."

"Then, my dear, you know she has two more babies, each paler and more frightful than the first; and if I thought her baby-mad before, she now ought to be made principal nurse to an infant school. Upon my word, I never see her without thinking of a basin of pap."

"She used to be very pretty."

"Pretty! yes; but such a slattern. She thinks of nothing but those children; and would you believe it, Mr. Royston made her a present of a gray Moiré (she really went about not fit to be seen), and she exchanged it, my dear, for three little drab-colored pelisses, embroidered in sky-blue silk. And you may think, with her weak babies, what they were like, in a week. Such a love of a gray! silver gray. I helped to choose it: ten shillings and sixpence a yard, my dear."

"I suppose she has a right to do as she pleases."

"Not at all, Lotty; that is a very mistaken notion of yours. People should always remember their friends, under any circumstances. It is quite a point with me to do so; and that is why I interest myself so much about you. Now mark my words, and be careful of those Erle boys. One is a boy no longer, and he will be getting your name compromised. Widows should be so particular, twice as much so as single women, and that is why I wish you to warn Margaret. It really is not right having Lord Erlscourt always in her house, and consulting him on every occasion."

"O! now you think she is going to marry him; last night it was Mr. Grey."

"I can never forgive you, Lotty, about that. I shall never forget Lord Erlscourt's look when I first told him; really, the muscles about his mouth quivered and shook, until I thought he would go and knock Mr. Grey down. No wonder, poor man! Now I see which way the wind blows. By-the-by, what unlucky person was it who hooked that poor Mr. Grey in (really he is a very nice, agreeable man; Fred. says sensible enough, though a little too religious for him) to marry that poor old thing?"

"Did no one tell you, Flo., it was an old affair, begun ten years ago?"

"Law! so that's it. Well, to return to Margaret; of course she will not be such a fool as to refuse Lord Erlscourt."

"I never asked her, and I don't suppose he has," said Lotty.

"Well, my dear, he is going to; of that I am positive. He gave her three pats of butter, one after another, and called her his dearest Margaret!"

"Great symptoms, Flo."

"Pooh, child! you will never get older or wiser, as long as you live, such pains as I take with you too. But remember my advice in this instance; don't associate too much with that old Scotchwoman—she will be doing you a mischief some day, with her gossiping tongue."

"Much obliged, mem; I'll aye trust that ye will be to the fore, to help the young leddy out on it."

"Dear me! I had no idea you were so near. However, I never say anything of which I am ashamed, so I cannot apologize."

"Deed, mem, for a' Janet Laird cares, ye may keep your apologees to yoursel'. I wad think ill o' mysel' if ye could say aught to fret me. Gang yer ways, guid body, the world is wide enough for us twa, wi'out me fashing mysel' to rub agin you."

"Vulgar old woman!" muttered Mrs. Bankes, walking off.

"My bairn, I am wanting your company on a bit business o' Mr. Grey's. There is a misguided set o' young things doon i' them cottages by the burn, and he thinks if we wad just luik after them a bit, they might get righted. We are no to flite 'em with owre much guid talk, which, aye me, for weak human nature, gaes a puir misguided body sit up their prood backs; but when we hae gettin' round 'em, we maun then tell him. They are yure hooses, my bairn, and they aye think a deal o' the little fairy mistress. The Lord forgie us! thinking so mickle on ye, bairn."

"The Lord forgive me, if I do not prove both grateful and deserving," answered Lotty, gravely. "But I am ready."

"Ay, my bairn," continued Mrs. Laird, as they pursued their way. "When I think o' the first time I catched a glint o' your little child face, I could a'most beat myself for thinking of what I thought; and says the doctor to me, 'I always kenned she was something abuve the common.' Ay, but thon's a man, that my lord."

"He does not think himself a woman, I dare say, Mrs. Laird."

"Hoot, bairn! de ye ken he has asked the doctor and me to visit him, when ye are a' wi' my Lady Montagu?"

"I am very glad of it," said Lotty.

"And he is no married, bairn!"

"No, not yet, Mrs. Laird; but I hope he will soon."

"And who to, child?"

"Why, you are Mrs. Bankes over again. I shall gratify no such curiosity, except to tell you, once he was very much in love, and upon the lady's marrying, he almost died of grief. But she is not married now; her husband is dead."

"And you think he will marry her, my bairn?"

"I hope so," said Lotty, as she switched off the head of a great thistle with a little stick.

"Bairn, ye dinna look pleased."

"I think I am in a bad humor some how, Mrs. Laird. I think Mrs. Bankes teases me."

"Ay, a body like that is aye a lighted candle stuck in a barrel of poodre; I'll hae to gie her my mind afore she leaves; I canna, as Mr. Grey says, laugh an ill word aff. So, my laird's ganging this summer aff to Holland, is he?"

"Yes, we have heard some more particulars about the ship, and he does not think Lady Leigh will be quite happy, until he has seen the wreck himself — at least, what is left of her."

"A feckless errand, my bairn, but I wad na be the person to deny my Leddy Leigh aught she asked. I wad think I was hindering ane of the Lord's chosen. And wi' a' her saintly luiks, the doctor tells me she is aye the best hand at business he ever lighted on; and a' tell the same thing. She has getten the estates most righted, they tell me."

"Yes, and of late a large sum has been paid into the bank from Australia, and it is supposed Mr. Price, the agent that went off with so much money, has repented, and returned some to her, or else he has made his fortune at the gold diggings, and has become an honest man."

"Weel, I wish him weel on wi' repentance and amendment. So noo, bairn, here is the house, and ye maun just pit on yer bit sweetest ways, to beguile they puir bodies to their guid."

* * * * * *

"My dear Lotty!" said Mr. Bankes, meeting her on her return home, "what do you think?"

Mrs. Bankes's eager, excited, worldly face, did not look to advantage by that of Lotty; for an elevated feeling made her eyes shine with the holy light of a pure star. She had not labored in vain on the errand she had been with Mrs. Laird. And the touching homage that the rough, wild people of the hamlet had paid her innocent youth and beauty, and gentle words, had greatly affected her. She was deep in thought, as to the cause that made some natures so repel the good that waited but to find a way into their hearts; while others seemed to cull pure and holy lessons from even the depth of misery and degradation into which they had fallen.

She was thinking over one speech that had been said to her: "I would like to please Mr. Grey, if I could, he is so heartsome." And she had returned for answer: "Mr. Grey seems to wish that everybody should be as happy as himself."

"Ay, deed, does he," answered the man. "And I'd like to know his way, weel; he is a kindly body, and shakes hands as if one was just of his own sort. But I don't know how I'll ever look i' the face of mankind with such like clear eyes."

"He loves the good God for giving him so many blessings, for so fair a world to live in, so many opportunites of doing good," answered Lotty.

"I am bound to say, he does nae try it owre strong upon us. I am weary o' hearing I'm sich a lost sinner. I'd like to hear how I can get oot of this pit o' wickedness, into which I never pit myself."

"Mr. Grey told us that last Sunday in church, and promised to go on with it next Sunday."

"Then I think I'll be going there; I wish to oblige him, he is heartsome and civil like."

"Very well," said Lotty. "Come; and as I go into church, I shall just look to see if you are there, and give you a nod."

"I'll take it very kind of ye, madam, for I'll feel myself a stranger, no doubt."

So Lotty was pondering over the rights and the wrongs of beguiling this man to church, through the instrumentality of liking for a fellow-mortal rather than a purer motive, love for God; and having happily settled in her own mind that it was a good thing to have got him to promise to come to church at all, here face was full of pure, happy feelings, when she met Mrs. Bankes with hers full of life's bustle.

"I think it is rather chilly this evening, Flo.," said Lotty, in answer to her question.

"Nonsense! child; he has proposed, actually and absolutely proposed this afternoon, and been accepted."

For a moment a quick, glowing blush crimsoned Lotty's face, and as it died away, left her apparently, from the contrast, perfectly pale; but she answered without a shade of difference in her voice, without even a tone of astonishment, —

"You are speaking of Lord Erlscourt and Lady Leigh."

"Yes, my dear, they little knew that I was hidden behind the curtain, and saw the whole scene: and he kissed her hand! O! my dear, with such fervency, it was quite touching, and I could not help longing to see Fred. in just the same graceful attitude."

"Are you sure you have made no mistake, Flo.?"

"Me! my dear; me make a mistake! no I thank you. I am very grateful to the Almighty for my full share of wits, and perhaps a little over. I don't mean to say I overheard every word, because that would have been very dishonorable on my part — in fact, such an act would have been quite beneath me; but when Margaret clasped her hands with delight, and leaned upon my lord's shoulder with her handkerchief to her eyes, what could I think of that, my dear?"

"That was a very natural action, if Basil had been doing what he often has done, acting a brother's part by her, and promising her his help in something she may have set her heart on."

"Pooh, pooh! my dear! don't chatter on in that foolish way. I heard — I could not help it — I heard her say, quite loud, in consequence of her energetic feelings, — 'Ah! Basil, I wanted but this to make my future life happy; I shall then see the world and all around me in a very different light to what I have done for the last eighteen months.' And then, my dear, her voice dropped, he kissed her hand, and it was, without exception, the most moving scene I ever witnessed. I slipped away through the open study door, and have been running in every direction in search of you. Now, really, Margaret has proved herself worthy of the fond interest I have ever shown her, and I hope, poor thing! my Lord will make amends to her for the sad life she led with Sir Harold. But now, my dear Lotty, that is not the half of what I have to say to you; of course you will be turned out of your snug quarters here, and as you cannot return to your own home with those vulgar Scotch people in it, I have thought of a capital scheme. You shall come and live with Fred. and me; Fred. is very fond of you, and you would with us, my dear, have cheerful and congenial society, and I will make a point of introducing you everywhere, and with your pretty, youthful style of beauty, and your peculiar dress, and doubling the real amount of your jointure, I make no doubt you will make a capital match, some how."

"To which I shall certainly forbid the banns, Mrs. Bankes," said Lord Erlscourt.

"O, law! my Lord, how you do startle one. What on earth sent you here?"

"I came in search of the same person as you did, therefore no wonder we met."

"I hope, my Lord, you overheard nothing."

"I heard quite sufficient for me to tell you, Mrs. Bankes, that take the whole population, including Mr. Bankes, double them all, extract from each every good they possess, and bestow it upon one man, still, in my eyes, he would not be worthy of Mrs. Leigh."

"I quite agree with you, my Lord; Lotty has always been a great favorite of mine."

"Good-by to you both," exclaimed Lotty; "if you have no better subject for your conversation than my unworthy self, excuse my remaining."

Lotty and Bear departed together.

"May I ask, Mrs. Bankes, what you have been telling Mrs. Leigh, in addition to the charming scheme for her future fate?"

"Nothing, I assure you; nothing at all."

"What!" continued Basil, smiling; "nothing to tell, after being behind a curtain? No, no, Mrs. Bankes, I have not so poor an opinion of you."

"Indeed, my Lord; on my honor, I made my escape as soon as ever I discovered what a very private conversation I was overhearing."

"But you heard enough to inform Mrs. Leigh of an important fact ——"

"Why, yes, you know, how could I mistake, my Lord?"

"That I offered my hand to Lady Leigh, and she accepted?"

"Allow me to be the first to congratulate you, my Lord. I always thought Margaret much more suited to you than Sir Harold. Lucky woman as she is, to have got rid of him so easily."

"Judging of her by yourself, I presume. Poor Mr. Bankes! But pray excuse me, you have omitted such a very important part of the news to Mrs. Leigh, I must overtake her, for the purpose of imparting it."

"O! pray tell me first, my Lord; I will be sure to tell Lotty. —Ah, well! he is gone. Certainly, he is the handsomest man; if I had seen him before Fred., now there's no saying. However, that is neither here nor there. I wonder what made him laugh so, as he went away! I doubt he is satirical; if so, poor Margaret is in for it again. A satirical husband always ends in sneering at his wife. I should like to see Fred. indulging in so much as a smile at my expense! Well, so really this affair is settled, and I have no one with whom to talk the matter over. I am disgusted with Margaret, I must allow, making such a fuss about her first husband, and only waiting a month or two over the year to accept another with gratitude, if you please. But this is a brilliant plan of mine about Lotty. She is sure to pay handsomely for her board, and is really a very striking-looking person though she is so little; and I don't tell her of it, because she may grow conceited. Her money will help Fred. and me well over the midsummer bills; and I shall become quite the fashion, with such a pretty, rich widow in my house."

CHAPTER LXVII.

Flo. pursued the tenor of these thoughts; and in discoursing them over with Fred., she was very nearly late for dinner. But others were later still. Though the last bell had rung, no Lotty was to be seen, and Lord Erlscourt was pacing up and down the room in a manner by no means common to him.

"Have you seen Mrs. Leigh?" he asked eagerly of Mrs.

Bankes, as she entered the room, hanging elegantly, as she termed it, on dear Fred.'s arm.

Though she simply answered "No," her thoughts had time to wonder what Margaret must think, to see her intended putting himself into such a fuss all for another woman ——

"Dinner is served, my Lady," pompously announced the butler, startling all Flo.'s thoughts off, by the sonorousness of his mode of imparting such interesting news.

"We must wait," said Lady Leigh. "Mrs. Leigh has not returned home."

"She has dined, my Lady, and desired me to inform you she would be with you at tea."

With marked vexation, Lord Erlscourt gave his arm to Mrs. Bankes, who forgave him his decided want of good taste, because of the peculiar circumstances of his case. On no account could they have arranged it, for her to go in to dinner on the arm of Fred. — that would have been so glaring before the servants. Otherwise, she enjoyed very much having Lord Erlscourt all to herself, and took every opportunity of breaking into any conversation between him and Margaret, because she felt it no more than her duty, if it were even for but one day, to prevent the servants guessing the real state of things. If Margaret had shown a want of feeling and delicacy, it was the more imperative she should be particular. Therefore she became at last quite confidential; whispering all sorts of things into his ear, about Lotty, and where she could be gone — perhaps to High Leigh, to tell the news — until Fred.'s hair began to stand on end with amazement. And if Lord Erlscourt had not answered all the whispers in a loud, anti-confidential tone, with a countenance and manner to match, it might have so occurred that Fred. would have succumbed to a fit of jealousy.

Lotty was in the tea-room when they left the dining-room, and had nothing to say in excuse for her absence, but that she fancied she would like a long walk, and Bear fancied the same thing.

She was very silent all the evening; no ready answers for Mrs. Bankes. Even Margaret said, "Are you tired, my Lotty?"

"You know I am never tired," muttered Lotty.

"Let us have some music, Florence?" asked Margaret; which request was often a gentle ruse on Lady Leigh's part, to employ the ever-active Mrs. Bankes in something harmless.

Basil took the opportunity of her being so engaged to write a little note, and fastening it in Bear's collar, he whispered to him to whom to convey it. After much coquetry on Bear's part, Lotty obtained the note. It only said, —

"May I walk with you in the morning?

"Basil."

"Go and say yes, Bear," answered Lotty, tossing the note into the fire.

Basil recovered his good humor, and found himself, under the influence thereof, praising Mrs. Bankes's dashing, crashing, rattling mode of scrambling over the keys of the piano, intending people to believe she was performing in the most approved style.

At night, when Lotty went up stairs, she sat, for some time after undressing, thinking in her chair instead of retiring to her couch. Bear sat opposite to her, winking and blinking his eyes all to no purpose at this strange proceeding. At last he elevated a paw, and tapped her inquiringly on the arm.

"So, Bear, you wonder what is the matter with Lotty? She is not tired, no, no; but some how her heart is weary. Well, what do you wish to say? Do you think it was all true that Flo. said? No, you don't. You turn away your head. Neither do I, Bear; we know our Margaret better; and Basil is too thoughtful, too considerate, to ask now. Besides — besides, what did he mean, by what he said this morning! O! you know, do you? you are pleased, and yet you know it must not be so. Do you not see that Lotty is not Lotty this evening? — she is weak and foolish. Tell Lotty to recollect her duty, to call up all her resolution; for to-morrow, Bear, to-morrow morning you and she will require all the fortitude, all the decision, all the determination, that ever you used before in your whole lives, concentrated in one short half-hour. We have borne many things together, Bear, and this last trial, this one other duty, is for Margaret, our queen. Anything we can bear for her, even though we have discovered, even though we feel, we half guess, why we could not love poor Philip, and why — yes, 'tis true, you need not turn away, why we shall have this heartache forever. But it can be done — it shall. A fond. foolish fancy makes him think he loves Lotty and Bear. So he does, so he ever will, but not as he is to love Margaret. No weakness on our parts shall mar that work. Our Margaret has had suffering enough; with Basil to guard her life, under God's blessing, she will know what happiness is. So now, Bear, to bed; whatever occurs to us, still we would not be Carry and Flo.; and while that is the case, and our Margaret is happy, what more need we?"

CHAPTER LXVIII.

BEAR was very unfeeling, being in conduct more like a thoughtless, mischievous puppy, than the recipient of a grave and heavy secret; so that, when Lotty was dressing in the morning, he had to be scolded for childish behavior on several occasions. It was so early, too, for his little mistress had hardly slept all night, and, as she noiselessly opened the hall door to let themselves out Bear was quite rude in his efforts to rush past. It was a dark February morning, the stars were yet shining in the deep, gloomy sky, showing, by their little glancing lights, Basil leaning against a pillar of the portico.

"How early you are, Basil!" said Lotty, at once a stern heroine outwardly. "No one is stirring yet."

"Save you and I, Lotty, which is just what I wished. Mrs. Bankes, in particular, is, I trust, still sleeping."

"You seem to be quite afraid of her."

"How your heart beats, Lotty!" interrupted Basil, as he drew her arm under his.

"No, it does not," said Lotty, angrily; "it is your own. I feel it against my arm."

"That I am willing to allow," answered he; "for if I only see Bear's nose, my heart is very much agitated."

"Bear is off over the fields, so do not put such nonsense upon him."

"I do not mean to do so; you know as well as I do, that when I see Bear, I expect his mistress."

They had been walking on during this conversation, and now came to a turn in the path; to the right was the cedar avenue, dark, close, mystical, — a true lovers' bower. To the left was a stile of three steps, which led to a breezy knoll in the park. Basil paused.

"Lotty, if what I have to say seems to you precipitate, selfish, inconsiderate, impute these sins to Mrs. Bankes rather than to me ——"

"You don't seem to like her," interrupted Lotty, in a short, dry tone.

"I may, ere long, love her, for being the means of ending a suspense that has been hateful and harassing to me. Twice before have I seen the happiness of my life slip from my grasp through over-many scruples. I might have waited — I would have waited yet a few months more, in pure delicacy to your mourning, but Mrs. Bankes's communication to you yesterday relieves me from silence. Lotty, I love you, sweetest, dearest Lotty — I woo you for my wife."

"You mistake, Basil," said Lotty, in a voice that might have come out of a marble quarry, it sounded so hard and cold. Basil made no answer, but suddenly put his arm round the slight waist, and, with one effort, he lifted her up and placed her on the upper step of the stile; then, with his arm still round her, he knelt on the lower one, and looked straight into her eyes.

In his she read an answer to her remonstrance, that needed no words. Glowing with the love of a noble, truthful heart, with so much of entreaty, that hers beat with pain, knowing what she must do; with such a world of tenderness, it throbbed with wild happiness that she had gained such a look; with such a tide of past sorrows, with such a fear of present grief, no wonder that Lotty's slight figure began to tremble with the greatness of her task, and that so many mingled emotions brought the blood in rushing fever to her face. Unable to bear the ardent and entreating glance of those eyes, feeling that blush after blush rose in uncontrollable emotion, Lotty covered her face with her hands. But even in them did the crimson tide run to the finger-ends.

Nevertheless, unchanged was the firm voice, as she again said: "Basil, this is a mistake."

"How can I mistake, Lotty?" he answered, in the low voice of a heart's question.

"You forget the trees of the old forest, and what you told them. You remember not the old house, deep in the woods, whose walls heard your first secret."

"I remember them full well. I had a sorrow, and I gave it to them. I had a grief that required branding from the heart. I laid the burning finger of duty on the place, and it was done."

"Only to break forth the more luxuriantly, Basil, for the fortitude with which it was suppressed."

"It broke forth in a new light, happy and free — a pure fountain, welling up to the lips with brotherly love, as was meet, and no more."

"But now, Basil, now it may flow as you list. She knows you once loved her; Harold told her."

"Bethink you, sweet, loving Lotty, so quick to read all characters, what man could look at Margaret and ask her to love twice? Would she act by me thus, in sweet, sisterly fondness, knowing that I once loved her otherwise, if she did not feel I would not insult her with a thought of marriage? Ah, Lotty! your usually true judgment is at fault here."

"Margaret is of a nature so clinging, so fond," whispered Lotty, hurriedly, "so young, time might accustom her to the thought. Think what a long life to lead, all lonely and mourning!"

"She is not lonely, she never will be; she thinks of her Harold by day as walking by her side, though unseen; she sees him in her dreams at night, and communes with him. Look in her eyes, and mark if the remembrance of Harold and his fate leaves them for a moment."

"It is true her eyes retain the shadow of her grief; other thoughts, another happiness, may restore their light."

"Not by me shall that pure heart, consecrated to its first and only love, be outraged. The love I gave Margaret on her marriage, was sacredly a brother's; and so resolutely was any other torn up by its roots, that even in that lone forest house, most surely beneath those friendly trees, did another bud of love begin to sprout, for a little thing with a child's face and a woman's heart."

"How very inconstant!" came from Lotty's lips, in a sort of flighty imitation of Mrs. Bankes's manner.

"And when we took that drive with Margaret to the ruined farm-houses, the bud grew to full and perfect blossom, until, at last, my whole heart is filled with the perfume of it."

"And yet you suffered me to marry Philip Leigh!" burst irrepressibly from Lotty's lips.

"Ah, Lotty! my Lotty! then, if I had asked then, I should not have been refused; nay, turn not away. Rather pity me, and think of my strange, sad fate, to be twice robbed of my hopes. This must excuse me, Lotty, if you think I have been too precipitate."

"I have nothing to excuse. If I were going to marry you, I might ask you to wait until the two years are over; but as I am not, no one need know that you have outraged my delicate feelings of decorum."

"In the dark, I must have mistaken Mrs. Bankes for my Lotty; surely ——"

"You must not call me so. And pray let me go, Basil; it is very cold, sitting like a turkey on the top of a rail, in February."

"Then my manhood's hopes are to be dashed to the ground, like my youth's dreams. You are merciless, Lotty."

"If one is to be disagreeable, it is best to do it well."

"You are free."

"Good-by, Basil."

As he released her their eyes met.

"Lotty, if I consent to wait, that you may have ample time to see how true my opinion is, how mistaken yours, — if I serve for you the time of a Rachel's price, ay, and double that, — may I hope that you will also ——"

"Wait! suppose I have the chance of marrying Mr. Bankes's red-haired cousin? Don't ask such a sacrifice."

"Not for worlds." A sunny light came into his eyes. "He is to be my only rival, then. Say so, Lotty. Ah! Lotty, make this one little concession to me, on which to hang a ray of hope."

"What concession?"

"You marry red-haired Mr. Bankes or me."

"I shall be in my grave before the one fact happens, so I can easily promise the other."

"Thank you a thousand times, and yet a thousand times to that. I begin my servitude to-morrow; it shall be my own fault if I do not prove to you the truth of my opinions; and if I take strange methods to do so, it is but to bring it unmistakably before your judgment."

"Do whatever you like, only remember my words — you are mistaken, you were mistaken, and if you are not careful, you will be mistaken."

"My choice is made; cold-hearted, but matchless Lotty, farewell!"

CHAPTER LXIX.

Mrs. Bankes was considerably surprised to find no Lord Erlscourt at breakfast, and still more so on hearing that he had departed for home.

"Dear me! is not his departure rather sudden?"

"Yes, it is," replied Margaret, in calm tones, "I had no idea he was going this morning, until I heard he was gone."

"I suppose to make preparations?" asked Flo.

"I have no doubt of it," answered Margaret, as calmly as ever.

"And when is it to be?" continued Flo., almost gasping with amazement.

"The moment the weather permits," was the quiet answer.

"In the name of goodness! Margaret," exclaimed Flo., "leave off your caps first."

It was now Lady Leigh's turn to look astonished, and, with a faint blush on her fair cheek, she said, "Lord Erlscourt has gone to prepare for a voyage to Holland—but, in fact, I need not explain the matter to you, for you were in the room, half hidden by the window-curtain, when he proposed, and I accepted, this act of true brotherly kindness."

"And was that all you settled?"

"You heard the whole," answered Margaret, her dove's eyes beginning to brighten with indignation.

"I beg your pardon, I went away as soon as I could, and I met Lotty, and we two settled it could only be one sort of proposal——"

"My Lotty knows her Margaret better;" and fondly kissing her, Margaret left the room.

"Well, to be sure! off like an enraged queen. I wonder you put up with her airs, Lotty."

"She never gives me any."

"No, I recollect you never could do wrong; but, Lotty, I hope you did not go gossiping over with this news to your old Scotch friend; for if you did you'll catch it, that's all."

"I will endure what I catch."

"I know you will, you good little thing! You are everybody's friend, and nobody's enemy but your own."

"That is the form of consolation bestowed upon him who loveth good wine, Flo."

"Pooh, pooh, child! but I wish you would listen to reason, from your best friend, I can tell you. Sooner or later, this marriage will take place, mark my words. The higher and more lofty my Lady Leigh holds her head, the sooner will she give in. I know precisely what her character is——"

"Ever since you thought it so odd, she did not (to use your own phrase, Flo.) prig my sugar-plums, when we were school-girls."

"You are very nonsensical this morning, Lotty; and where are you going now?"

"To a hamlet on the road to High Leigh, to take this prayer-book to a great sinner."

"My dear, I will go with you. I want a private chat with you, and I may put you in the way of doing a great deal of good, in a sensible way."

Bear gave a sort of howl, which was either caused by his own peculiar sense of the honor, or because Lotty pinched his ear.

"Bless that dog!" exclaimed Flo., on the spur of the start he gave her; "one would suppose he was a Christian, and was jealous at my proposing to walk with you."

"You are very jealous, are you not, Bear?" answered Lotty, pinching again.

Bear howled to a roar.

"Lotty, you must leave that dog at home; I will not go out with such a brute."

"Very well, Flo. — Bear, you are to stay at home."

Bear trotted off, apparently quite content; and when Flo. joined Lotty, in her walking dress, she expressed herself highly satisfied that he was not to be seen.

Lotty laughed, and said, "Don't exult until you are out of the wood."

On the road to the hamlet, Mrs. Bankes gave Lotty a long history of all her troubles and sorrows: how she and dear Fred. were fearfully in debt; how old Bankes, the father, would help them no more; how stingy he was, and cross; and how all might be delightfully arranged and settled, if she would come and live with them, and giving them three hundred pounds per annum, which she would never miss, they might even keep a little brougham. "For, my dear, words cannot tell you how cabmen cheat — they take a perfect fortune. Is this the hamlet, dear? how pretty! Bless me! why that dog is very like yours, only he looks more gentle."

"Come here, sir," said Lotty; "did I not tell you, you were not to walk with us, Bear?" for it was he, who wagged his tail, as much as to say he came by himself, and not with them.

"So you did," said Lotty, in answer to the mute appeal; "therefore, if you will behave like a gentleman, you may return with us."

"Lotty, that dog is just a demon, an evil spirit; if he were mine, I should certainly have him destroyed. Does he understand all you say?"

"Yes, like a proper demon; — but here is my friend whom I came to see. — I have brought you a prayer-book, to be ready for next Sunday."

"Thank ye, ma'am. My missus is main glad I be going to church; she says I must get faith to be good, and I dunna joost know what faith be."

"Your missus had faith, that when she married you, you would prove a good husband to her."

"Lord save ye, ma'am! I doubt I hanna been that."

"Does she now think you make her a bad one?"

"Bless her heart, no! my Betsy always thinks I'll mend."

"Then she has faith."

"Be that it, surely?"

"Yes; and if Betsy has faith in you, a weak, erring mortal, why art thou of so little faith, O man, that thou believest not in the goodness and mercy of God?"

"The Lord forgive me! sure, that's true. Please his goodness, I'll strive to mend."

"Lotty, my dear," said Flo., on returning home, "that man is a hypocrite, mark me."

"Why, Flo.?"

"He wishes to get something out of you, my dear, he is so ready to be converted."

"I think not, Flo.; he has had a miserable life for the last five or six years. Within these few months Margaret has given him constant work, and the change from want and wickedness to competence, with self-respect, will have its due effect upon him."

"That is all very fine. You will find him spending all his money at the alehouse, instead of coming to church."

"Still, Flo., we shall have the satisfaction of thinking we did our best to reclaim him."

"Poor satisfaction."

Flo. would not have thought it such, with all her flightiness, if she had seen the meeting of Lotty and her friend at church the next Sunday, and, indeed, for many a Sunday after.

The look of happiness in Lotty's eyes, as she made her gentle bow of recognition in the church porch, called a blush of pride and pleasure into the rough, coarse face of that sinning man. The rising blood came from a heart on which had fallen one good seed of kindly sympathy, and the spring, once found, never failed.

CHAPTER LXX.

Easter-Tuesday arrived, an important day for Pru. The long, lingering attachment she had evinced for a certain curate, was brought to an abrupt close, and sprouted up with redoubled vigor and growth into an ardent affection for her rector husband. This being the seventh marriage recorded in this book, it fortunately happened to be unlike any of its predecessors in more than one respect.

First, John Grey insisted upon everybody walking to church. "For," said he, "that will afford Charlotte time to weigh well what she is about at the last moment."

Charlotte proved her appreciation of his kind thought, by walking more nimbly than usual, which occasioned Lotty to remark, "that Pru. seemed to fear he might change his mind."

Pru.'s answer to this unkind speech was a laugh, which she intended to be scornful; but, alas! she was little gifted with the necessary commodity to express such a feeling, consequently it was such a merry laugh, John kissed her hand before all the company on the spot.

Secondly, the wedding was so quiet, Pru. was nearly reduced to having the parish clerk for a bridesmaid, if Miss Rachel Clare had not kindly stepped in to the vacant responsibility. Lotty did propose the twins, but it seemed probable that half way to church, the bride and bridegroom would have to take each a little bridesmaid up in their arms and carry them the rest of the way.

The third and last peculiarity was, that no smart chaise and four came to the door, with radiant and rubicund-faced post-boys streaming with favors and primed with beer. It was the bride and bridegroom who staid at home while all the company went away. "For," said good John Grey, "Mr. Herbert left his parish to my care, and I do not mean to leave it until he comes to resume his duties. Let those who wish it, remain and see mine and my Pru.'s happiness. Those who think such a sight would overpower them can leave."

So it fell out that they all left, "thus," as Lotty remarked, "depriving themselves of all the luck and advantages of having old shoes thrown after the carriage."

Lady Katherine returned home with Mr. and Mrs. Frank; Margaret to her mother, at Montagu House, accompanied by Miss Rachel; Lotty to her own people, who were impatient to have her. So Mr. and Mrs. Laird were the only people who remained in the neighborhood, and witnessed now and then the happiness of the newly married; and as they were Scotch people, with good strong nerves, they bore the sight with the utmost composure and fortitude.

In April, Basil, with his brothers, departed on his voyage.

His letters to Margaret were constant during the weeks he spent hovering about that wild and weary spot, whose treacherous sands have ingulfed so many high and noble hearts, and been the dread of all mariners ever since the history of the world.

Though she had never told them so, Lotty and Basil knew that Margaret clung to the idea of recovering the body of her Harold. It seemed but the one thing wanting, ere she resolutely and forever submitted to her lot. If she could visit some tomb, have something which contained his ashes, and where hers might mingle with them, it would suffice for her tender heart. The restless longing, the ever-recurring question, "Was he really gone?" appeared but natural; for her dead had never been removed from her sight. There had been no sick bed, with its hopes and fears, and sad preparation. No last words to be treasured up. No lifeless form, no touch of marble features; no closing of beloved and loving eyes, the extinction of whose light darkened a living heart forever. Death takes all these and much more to force itself in all the stern reality upon those who share but one spirit between them. Thus the heaviness of the blow had, for the first year of her mourning, fallen with numbing effect upon her soul, in addition to the gentle endeavor to spare the poor, conscience-stricken mother; but as the frame recovered its elasticity, so did the feelings become more acute, rendering Margaret more restless and unhappy than she had been at all. Among other desires was a wish to visit Cowes. A pining wish to tread in the place his footsteps had last pressed, to see the house he had lived in, and visit the last spots he had touched on earth, took possession of her. As if divining all Margaret felt, Lotty persuaded Lady Katherine to propose a visit to the sea-side for them all, and as the time settled for Basil's return home was approaching, it seemed natural enough for them all to adjourn to the Isle of Wight.

Here, though eighteen months and more had elapsed since the tragedy occurred, they were too much the object of interest to escape notoriety. So they retired to Bonchurch, making excursions from time to time to visit the places Margaret wished. Lotty had expected her to have this reaction; but she knew that when once the dark fit had passed, Margaret would be for the rest of her lifetime resigned, nay, cheerful.

Unluckily for their desire to be quiet and alone, the ever-restless Mrs. Bankes had seen in the newspapers the account of their arrival at Bonchurch; and she and Carry being at that time in lodgings together at Ryde, agreed it would be no more than neighborly, and a proper duty to their former schoolfellows, if they left their gay quarters at Ryde, and took up their abode near them.

To Carry, the change was pleasant; she cared only for her babies. To Flo., the plan was advisable; she wished to pursue her designs on Lotty's liberty.

For in truth, Flo. and her husband were much embarrassed, as regarded pecuniary matters. And having been assisted several times by old Mr. Bankes, that gentleman had at last become angry and indignant, flatly refusing to assist them. And in addition to this very uncomfortable announcement, he had favored Mrs. Frederick Bankes with his private idea of the matter, openly declaring it was her extravagance, thoughtlessness, and love of dress, that was ruining his amiable, but not over-wise son. Flo. was never backward in retorting; and, therefore, a scene ensued, which rendered it desirable that all parties should separate for a time. Flo. thought it a relief to join even Carry at the sea-side, and was civil to the babies, rather than lose this haven. It was, therefore, good news to know that Lotty was so near; and if she only could persuade her to live with them for a few months, she felt certain of being restored to favor in her husband's family. They were good, kind-hearted people, generous and forbearing, and by no means deserving the character Flo. gave them.

But their old schoolfellows were by no means so pleased to see them, and thought of quitting the field of action, when news came of the return of the "Ripple."

Poor Margaret gave way more than she had ever done before, at this failure of her last hope of recovering the body of her Harold. And they let her surfeit herself with her grief. They felt certain that the remembrance of Harold's last words would soon return to her, and the wish to do all he had so fondly desired, would become her daily task.

Nothing now was left to her but the hope of being again united to him in another world, that hope he had so ardently expressed himself. But she had a great deal to do, duties to perform, certain things must be done, ere she prepared for that change which would restore her once more, and forever, to her Harold. She must be up and doing — no blot must tarnish the brightness of that hour, no remembrance of things undone, no remorse for time wasted; she must be able to say, "I have done all that weak human nature could do; take now thy servant to rest."

Basil and Lotty kept strict ward and watch over their Margaret, that no invasion of Bankeses and Roystons should vex her perturbed spirit during the few remaining days of their stay.

Lotty never left Mrs. Bankes's side for a moment when calling at their house, which made that worthy person say to herself, "How fond that little thing is of me! she is a nice little soul, too, and *so* pretty; she will make quite a sensation while she is with me."

While Basil admired all Mrs. Royston's babies, and witnessed all their various performances with such interest, that she confided to Flo.: "It was a sad pity he was not married, and had children of his own."

"My dear, he is going to be," answered Flo., with vast importance. "When I was down at Court Leigh, the whole matter was intrusted to me, but, of course, confidentially, it being early yet."

"But, dear Flo., you might tell me," coaxed Carry.

"Not for worlds," sternly answered Flo., charmed at perceiving Carry interested about something besides babies, and conceiving it her duty to be inexorable on that account.

"It cannot be Lotty," said Carry, sulkily; "for though his brothers brought her a number of presents, he never gave her one, and hardly speaks to her, that I can see."

"My dear, be patient, then, indeed, you will see what you will see; but I cannot have Lotty flirting with those boys — I must speak to her. Presents, indeed! what business has she to be accepting presents from young men? — she will get herself into a fine mess."

"And I heard them asking her for a lock of hair, in return."

"True, so they did; but I was glad to perceive that she had sufficient discretion to refuse her own, though she gave them some of the dog's. Ah, me! I must warn her — it is but a step from Bear's tail to her head."

It need hardly be mentioned, that before long, Carry was in full possession of all Flo. had to tell, whether true or not; the love of gossiping being superior to the wish of teasing Carry.

On the morrow after this conversation, they both agreed to pay a long visit to their old schoolfellows, and spying out all they could, mutually to reveal all to each other, compare notes, and draw their own conclusions. But the visit was not paid, inasmuch as on their road to the house they met the heavy travelling coach and four of Lady Katherine, well packed and crammed, and caught a glimpse of the old lady, sitting bolt upright, as if still in presence of the gracious Queen Charlotte, of the fair, sad face of Margaret, of Lotty, and Lottina, bo-peeping at each other for amusement, evidently one and all prepared for a long journey.

"Law!" exclaimed Flo., in a tone of indignant disappointment.

"Gracious heavens!" murmured Carry; "young Sir Harold is outside! on the box! with the butler!!!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

TRULY they were all on their road home, where they duly arrived, and were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Grey.

John Grey said, "Talk of Darby and Joan! all I can tell you is, it would take six Darbies and six Joans to equal mine and my Pru.'s happiness." Mrs. Laird came over the next morning, and kissed and blessed them all, as if she had not had a moment's peace or happiness since they left.

"And sae my Lord's aff i' the morrow?"

"Yes, Mammy Laird," said Lotty, in her glee and happiness; "he has devoted himself long enough now to Margaret; he must go and see after his own affairs."

"I am thinking he wad hae gettin a bit business here to sattle, my bairn, ere he went back."

"He has no business here, except to do as you do, and that is, spoil us."

"Hoot! bairn, it's my belief you are come hame more full of mischief nor ever. Hae ye quarrelled, hinney?"

"Such a question! just as if any one could quarrel with me."

"Dinna ye think owre weel o' yersel': ay, but ye are the bonniest thing.—But I'll say nae mair: ony just tell me, hae ye and my lord no hit it joost?"

"What have you been doing, during our absence? taking to bad ways, I fear."

"He no spaks a word till ye, and he no luiks at ye, and he gangs ane way, when ye come the tither—I dinna understand it, bairn."

"Ask him, then, if you are so unhappy; perhaps out of kindness to you, he will say for once, 'My dear Lotty, I hope you are well,' or 'have you walked to-day?' or 'have ——'"

"Be dune wi' a' yer clashing and nonsense. I'll no expect ony sense out of ye, if ye dinna mind, my bonny, bonny, darling thing."

It was of no use to ask any more questions, or to find fault; the very sight of her made Mrs. Laird's heart go pitapat, as if the doctor was sueing again for her maiden hand; she said, "I'll aye scold her weel, byes and byes, but I am just daft wi' sight o' her; surely she is getting more bonny and winsome every day."

"Now, Lotty," said Margaret, "you and I will spend a good and happy winter. We shall be alone; Basil does not think to come near us again until spring, and my mother must not move in the winter: Lady Katherine will be with her John Grey. I have sent for a number of books, and you must read aloud to me; we must break Master Harold into learning some lessons, and then you must help me all about the property."

"Good me!" replied Lotty, "I am very glad that you have ceased talking. Except for the voice, I thought it was Flo. chattering on."

Margaret kissed her, smiling, and said, "Saucy thing, why may not I chatter like others? But I wish to tell you a good thing, Lotty: Messrs. Moneypenny have sent their clerk over here, to tell me another remittance has come from Australia of two thousand five hundred pounds, and with the bill is a short note, saying it is to be placed to my account; and here is the note, Lotty. It is undoubtedly in Mr. Price's handwriting."

"It is very like it, certainly."

"See! I have collected some old letters of his, and it is exactly the same. Now, is this not a good thing, Lotty?"

"For you, very, Queen Margaret —— "

"For me! Can you not think how good it is that this man repents? No more will my Harold's name be stained with the stigma, that through negligence, ignorance, or indolence he incited a soul to sin. Ah! Lotty, what is the money, doubled, trebled, in comparison to that?"

"Dear Meg.! I love you, and think as you do."

"And now, Lotty, I may, with a clear conscience, raise a monument to his name. I mean no outward show, no vain glorying, no pompous epitaph. In my heart of hearts is my Harold's name written, never more to be effaced from that innermost spot. But I should like, Lotty, in his name, and for his sake, to build that little church. I have money, for the credit side at Messrs. Moneypenny's bank is now in favor of the Court Leigh estates; and in gratitude to God, I may begin to spend it in his service. The schools, also! Indeed I have many things to do before — before —— "

"When, Margaret?"

"I join my Harold."

"Ah! Margaret, is that the goal of your desires? Is it this idea that makes you welcome each new day with joy, and yet bless the evening of each day as a still greater boon?"

"Yes, yes, it is this, only this!" and locking her fair fingers together, Margaret's face became changed. Lotty saw, with surprise, that her eyes looked upwards, as if she beheld a sight that Lotty could not see. She appeared to think she was alone with this viewless vision, for whisperingly from her lips came the words, —

"Yes, Harold, another year has almost passed; I am so much nearer to you. I will leave our children well fitted, and of age to cope with the world. The name of Leigh shall be honored and blessed. Then, Harold, my Harold, we meet to part no more."

As Lotty marked the words, and viewed the absorption of Margaret's heart, a flood of light flashed up into her eyes, the rosy blood spread hither and thither, high up on the snowy brow, and down the little white throat; brighter, more vivid, until at last, with her face all scarlet, Lotty glanced in a sort of shame-faced way at Margaret — she was still absorbed; so stealing shyly away, Lotty went off to hide these emotions, so strange and new to her, in a covert, where not even Bear could find her. It was some hours ere they met again; both were restored to their usual state of mind, which in Lotty had consisted for some time of a morose character. Very naughty and unlovable she was at times.

"Lotty, dear!" said Margaret, "I do not think you bade Basil farewell when he went away."

"No!" said Lotty, shortly.

"Have you two quarrelled?"

"No! thank you; that would be taking trouble for nothing."

"There is something not quite kind about you at present, and I do not know whose fault it is."

"It is a matter of so little consequence, I wonder you trouble your head about it."

"Do you deem me so selfish and unkind that I see nothing, even when it concerns my two dearest and best friends?"

"I implied nothing of the sort, Margaret; I but insinuated it was of no moment whether Basil and I were friends or not."

"Ah! I have suspected something was the matter for some time. He never writes to you now, or sends you little loving messages, and even calls you Mrs. Leigh."

"And very proper too. It is high time he should remember that I am not little Lotty."

"If his conduct pleases you, little, wilful Lotty, then must I be satisfied? But I had a wish, a fond wish ——"

"Which you had better scatter to the four winds at once," interrupted the little Bear, Lotty.

* * * * * *

So they passed a busy and quiet winter, during which a faint bloom rose in Margaret's cheeks, that the sharp winter blasts sometimes deepened into a glow.

Gerald had been written to about the new church, and had sent his cordial consent and approbation, welcoming, as much as his parishioners did, the idea of keeping Mr. Grey among them.

Lotty insisted upon endowing the new church when completed, for it would benefit the estate of High Leigh more than any other place. "Besides," said she, "it is Philip's legacy — his memorial tablet."

"Ech, bairn! it's wonderfu' the rock o' sense in that wee head. I wad like to see ye do something joost no canny, or by ordinar foolish," said Mrs. Laird.

"Bear shall pull Cowslip's tail. Will that do?"

"Hoot, awa! at aye time, Miss Rachel, she's no canny, this bairn."

"Canny or not, Mrs. Laird, we cannot help loving her," said Miss Rachel.

"And sae Mistress Herbert's to the fore agin, and they'll be hame the next summer."

"Yes. She is growing strong, well, and fat; so it will be an encouragement to us to go when we are miserable and thin," said Lotty.

"My certie! when will we see thon? though I'm speering you're no that weel, my bairn."

"I have thought so for some time, Mrs. Laird," said Margaret, just coming up. "I think she pores over those learned books too much, and that makes her —— "

"Cross!" interrupted Lotty.

"Nay, nay," continued Margaret; "but I have come to make a proposal — shall we not have the first stone of the new church laid next Tuesday, the fourteenth of February?"

"No. I will not have it so," said Lotty.

"Why, my Lotty, it seems to me, after being dead for two or three years, the little Bear has come to life again," answered Margaret, in surprise.

"Then that is an additional reason the beginning of so good a deed should not commence on such an evil day."

"The little Bear has returned without any doubt. Ah, Pru.! you are just in time," continued Margaret. "Would you believe it? Lotty is cross."

"O! pray excuse me, dear Margaret, but I cannot believe it; neither, I am sure, will John," said Mrs. Grey.

"Nay, judge for yourself. She will not suffer the first stone of the new church to be laid upon her birthday."

"O!" exclaimed Pru., with great animation, "it must, it shall!—and it is a most curious circumstance, John and mamma settled it on that very day too."

"Then that decides it, best Lotty; so, kiss me, and say you are a good girl, and will never be so naughty again."

"Take the kiss if you wish it, Margaret; but as for the promise, I cannot give it."

"Now, is she not a little Bear?" said Margaret, turning to Pru.

Pru. was all anxiety to know if she was quite well. The cholera had broken out in Newcastle-on-Tyne, and she much feared there was a bad, infectious air about. To which kind concern for her health, Lotty only replied by throwing up the window on that cold winter day, and walking straight into the supposed bad air. But the clear, bracing atmosphere blew away her crossness, and when, in the afternoon, she and Margaret met Dr. Laird, after their brisk walk of three miles, their blooming looks called forth his highest encomiums.

"That's the way, ladies, that's the way to cheat your doctor. Walk like that every day of your lives, never mind a driving sleet shower or a smart brush of hail, as I see you have not to-day, and you will live, with God's blessing, the allotted portion of man's life, hale and vigorous to the close."

"Ech, doctor! I dinna ken which is bonniest o' them twa. I thought there was nae rosebud like our little leddy of High Leigh, but, with the color in her cheek, and the happy light in her eyes, the Leddy Leigh is a picture o' beauty," said Mrs. Laird in confidence to her husband that evening.

"I never saw two like them, Janet; and to think that they should be widows, poor young things, both on them!"

"They winna be that lang, doctor, I am thinking. My Lord Erlscourt kens as weel as we do, they are no to be matched."

"Hoot, woman! do you mean to make a Turk of my Lord? —he canna marry both."

"Ye needn't fleech at me, Alick; I kens what I kens. I'm a Scotchwoman, and we are no given to luve twice. My Leddy Leigh is my Leddy Leigh, and I'll sae nae mair nor nae less."

"You think she will bide so. Weel, may be; but, oneyways, Mrs. Leigh has had nae sich heart-grief. If my Lord fancies her, may be she'll no objec."

"Fancies her! ech, fancies her! — and ye ca' yersel' a man o' pairts, Alick!"

"Come, Janet, don't flyte out at me like that. I'll agree that I am no so sharp as you in luve matters, if that wull content ye."

"I kenned that owre weel afore, man. Fancies her, indeed! —Gang yer ways and get a pipe, doctor, to compose ye, for yer very aggravating this afternoon."

The doctor laughed, and contentedly departed to obey her injunctions. So the thirteenth of February came, and all was prepared for the next day's ceremony.

"There is a letter from Basil, and he says nothing about coming to-morrow," said Margaret, in a disappointed tone.

"Then I suppose he will not come," answered Lotty.

"He sends no message to you, Lotty."

"I did not expect one, Meg."

"But he asks after Bear."

"You can tell him he has two gray hairs in his tail."

"Lotty! Lotty! — but perhaps he has written to you?"

"To me! — wherefore?"

"To tell you Brian is going to Oxford, and Hugh insists upon becoming a civil engineer."

"That boy was always examining the interior of steam-engines, and pulled everything to pieces, only to find out how it was made."

"They both send their love to you, Lotty, but Basil must have forgotten his."

"As I expected none from him, I am not disappointed."

Margaret tried to read the little Bear's imperturbable countenance in vain.

That night Lotty was again absorbed in thought ere she went to bed, and the great Bear had to touch her more than once.

"Yes, Bear, I know. But we are in a difficult position. Another year, if not two, must pass. We cannot tell what time may do. Bear and Lotty are not to do anything that they may hereafter repent. Our Margaret is so much better, so much more cheerful, and she has so many cares, requiring a man's help. It may turn out to be a necessary good, an absolute want. Though we are young, and supposed to be not over wise, we have had our experiences, Bear; and thus we have reason to think that changes almost as startling as the Ethiop changing his skin, and the leopard his spots, might occur, and do occur, in this gray, hoary-headed, venerable old world. And what a silly, foolish, childish, not to say wicked, world it is sometimes! However, we cannot mend it; we can only do our duty; and if Lotty loves Bear, and Bear loves Lotty, I dare say, whatever occurs, they will make themselves happy." Bear kissed Lotty after canine fashion, in token of perfect agreement in all she said; and then Lotty passed with noiseless footfall into the sleeping apartment she shared with Margaret.

The sound of a low voice made her pause on the threshold. Again were the fair fingers laced together, the upturned face and inspired eyes beholding a vision Lotty could not see, and from the parted lips came Margaret's words, speaking to her Harold. If possible, more fervent, more urgent, more exalted than before were her looks and words, making Lotty blush again with a vivid brightness. But she whispered to herself, —

"It matters not. She mourns her Harold as deeply as if she lost him yesterday. But wait we will, Bear."

CHAPTER LXXII.

THIS Valentine's-day rose dark, stormy, and snow-ridden. As Lotty peeped out of the window, the light of the candle by which she was dressing made everything appear as if still wrapped in the gloom of a gusty night.

"Heed it not Bear, we have been out in darker, more stormy mornings than this; we will go into the cedar walk, until the day speaks out a little stronger. But after all, Bear, I do not think it is so bad — the candle deceived us."

As she spoke, she opened the door and passed out. A hand stayed her, and a voice, low but thrilling, said, as if it asked a momentous question, —

"Is this my Lotty?"

“ No, it is Mrs. Leigh,” answered she, with somewhat of the freezing morning in her tone.

“ I hope Mrs. Leigh is quite well,” answered Basil, taking off his hat, and bowing with such extreme politeness, that a flock of little mad snow flakes, driven by the freaks of the wind, clutched hold of his fair curls to save themselves a further flight, and in their refuge found their death.

“ Quite well, thank you, Basil ; and so is Margaret.”

“ Lotty, I must walk with you,” exclaimed Basil ; his assumed manner vanishing.

“ Pray do,” answered she.

He drew her arm within his, and they passed on to the cedar walk.

“ And so, Lotty, I am to have no better comfort than this, for acting the part of a dissembler, a hypocrite, the past year ? ”

“ Hypocrite ! how so ? ”

“ Obliged to smother my real feelings, hide my heart’s wish, affect a coolness, that only created a still more burning love ——”

“ Don’t be absurd, Basil ! I will allow you have been very good — in fact, nothing could have succeeded better. Margaret imagines we do not care one straw for each other.”

“ We ! thank you, Lotty ; if I can persuade you to grant me no more, I can live upon that ‘ we ’ for some time.”

“ It was a slip, Basil.”

“ ’Twas said ; nothing can drive it from the place where memory has placed it. Now, Lotty, answer me truly. Can you yet so wilfully deceive yourself as to think Margaret would marry again ? ”

“ Not at present, certainly,” answered Lotty, blushing again, at the remembrance of Margaret’s constancy to the dead.

“ And pray, how long will it take to convince you ? ”

“ I won’t be bullied, Lord Erlscourt.”

“ I feel very much inclined to take you in my arms and carry you off, you are so very wilful,” said he. “ You were forced to marry once ——”

“ For shame, Basil ! Take example by that marriage ; if you want me to love you, abide my own time.”

“ Concession the second. Thanks, Lotty ; remember, if I seem impatient, the prize I am trying for, and the utter unreasonableness of your ideas.”

“ Wait until I have proved them such.”

“ I suppose,” continued he, “ that you know, when Millicent returns, Miss Rachel is going to live with Margaret.”

"No, I did not. Who arranged this?"

"I did; and that is the reason I prevented her applying for the governess's place at the school in Warrington. She shall be governess to young Harold and his sister, and Margaret's companion."

"I am Margaret's companion."

"Yes, at present, and so is her mother. But, by-and-by, when God calls Lady Montagu to the home not made by hands, for which she is so fitted, and a certain wilful Lotty may plead Margaret's lonely state as a reason for driving a faithful, loving heart to despair, Miss Rachel will step in as the panacea to so much woe."

"Men are so selfish," answered she.

"In matters of the heart, Lotty, they ought to be, from justice to the merits of her they love. For my part, such is my opinion of the love that an honest and true heart should offer to another heart worthy of it, all the world must be as a grain of sand in comparison. When I am permitted to show my love, but the God who made her, and gave to me the priceless boon of her affections, shall have my adoration before her."

"All that sounds remarkably fine; keep it for a fitting occasion. Meantime, without much conceit, let me tell you, Lotty is Lotty to Margaret. No Rachel will take her place."

"That is true; in fact, though there is a wilful Lotty, a spoiled one, a childish one, a cruel, merciless, aggravating one, yet is there but one Lotty in the world, and she is matchless. Now do not turn away. I want to tell you, that it is as much for Margaret's sake, as for any selfish motive of my own, that I have counselled her to offer Miss Rachel a permanent home."

"Wherefore?"

"For this reason. There is between these two women a bond so peculiar, that it may be said to have been riveted together with the scalding tears of bitter agony, and therefore no human forge can sever the links. As Harold and the little sister sank together, hand in hand, leaving their earthly frames a prey to the remorseless sea, while their purified spirits rose at the same moment to the footstool of God; so will these two mourning, but resigned hearts, go hand in hand through the world, each feeling that they are to be to the other a substitute for those they have lost; each hoping to assist each other during the weary time they must wait God's pleasure. Thus, Lotty, this bond between Margaret and Rachel in no one way affects her love for you. You will still be the bright spirit that will enliven her, the link that will keep her feelings young, the happy medium through which light and flowers may yet bloom in her path. But Rachel — the sight of Rachel stirs her up, to be about and do the work allotted her — Rachel, whose little sister died a cruel death, her hand clasped in that of Margaret's Harold, without a murmur."

"I will never leave Margaret as long as she requires me."

"And I will never ask you to do so while that is the case. But, Lotty, say something kind to me, give me a little hope; a word, nay, a look; anything on which to think, on which, when I grow very impatient, I may ponder, and be content."

"Well, then, I think — yes, I am sure — I like you better than Flo.'s red-haired cousin."

"Out on you, for the smallest yet most pungent morsel of cruelty ever man met!"

"Flo. is very generous in her proffers of friendship and hospitality. I get a letter once a month, asking me to go and live with her and dear Fred."

"Pray go, if you wish it," uttered Basil, resigning her arm.

"By-the-by, Basil, do take care, if we go to the sea-side this summer, that it is in some remote corner of the coast, where we cannot possibly be discovered by Carry and Flo. — But, O! ye stars, if Margaret is not tapping at the window. How could you suffer me to be late for breakfast, Basil?"

Basil was in no mood to respond, so he went in to greet Margaret, while Lotty ran up stairs to change her things. When she reäppeared, so fresh and blooming, with a sad wicked spirit of mischief dancing in her eyes, Margaret met her with very inquisitive looks, saying, eagerly, "So you have been walking with Basil?"

"No," said Lotty, "he walked with me."

Margaret gazed from one to the other, in a little sort of flush of expectation; but Basil was calmly cutting a loaf of bread, and Lotty said, "Lady Montagu, here are two violets."

"I said, you would be sure to come to-day, Basil," began Margaret; "not only because we are to lay the first stone of the new church, but because of Lotty's birthday."

"Is it your birthday, Mrs. Leigh?" said Basil, with an assumption of indifference, that would have done honor to a Spartan, while he helped himself to an egg with the utmost solicitude.

"I believe so," answered Lotty, in a tone to match.

"I have to beg your pardon for bringing you no offering suitable to the day," continued he, most wickedly; for all the time he had a certain parcel in his pocket, that was to have been given, if——. A frown passed over his fair brow as this if intruded itself.

"I will endeavor to survive without," retorted Lotty.

"Do you know you tease me very much, you two," said Margaret. "Did you not always think, mamma, that they were such friends?"

"The quarrels of friends are the renewal of love, my dear," said Lady Montagu, quoting the proverb, for no particular idea that it was at all applicable.

Lotty grew crimson. Basil glanced at her, and said, with the utmost composure, "I think, Mrs. Leigh, you and I have not arrived at that point of interest, in which a quarrel might be said to affect us, either in love or malice."

"I don't wish to quarrel with you, Basil," answered Lotty, recovering herself, "and beg to announce the fault will be yours, not mine, if we do."

But in the course of the day she took occasion to whisper, "That was very well done on your part, Basil." And so he departed the next day, with only that crumb of comfort, after assisting at the laying of the first stone of the church.

The day had proved fair, in spite of its stormy commencement; and no heart assisted at the good deed, which did not feel a solemn compact was made by Lady Leigh, that this church was but the beginning of many good works, which she meant to rear in memory to her Harold. Within this house of prayer, she would pray for strength to "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with her God."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

HAPPY was the life at Rose Leigh. John Grey had been so charmed with the name of Pru., he was in the habit of doubling it. It was delightful to see the enjoyment of Lady Katherine; experiencing, for the first time, the happiness of a real home, unshackled by forms and ceremonies.

And as if to make amends to the world in general, and to her dependants in particular, for the stately reserve she had formerly kept up, she now opened her heart to everybody who would take the trouble of listening to her. We have seen that she was fond of talking at all times, though she would in earlier days talk only to those she deemed her equals.

Now it was very different; she had learned to consider herself but another morsel of dust, distinguished from countless others by little that was good, and more that was bad and unchristianlike. At least, such was her humble judgment of herself, without ever losing the impression that she had lost her son through her own pride and folly; she yet only used this remembrance as a spur to make her more kind, more humble, more charitable to every one.

Under a stern and severe disciplinarian she would have become a rigid and penance-seeking devotee. Under the gentle, wholesome doctrine of John Grey, she was being born again, receiving the sweet spirit of a little child. Even her countenance, her speech, the very rustle of her stiff silk dresses, showed the change. Who could have recognized the Lady Katherine of six years before? Never with any pretensions to beauty, yet with no particular bad feature, her appearance had been always rather forbidding from her expression of pride. Cold and stately, she never unbent; severe and harsh upon little minor faults, more the result of habit than opinion, the eye that met hers trembled to think how she would visit sins and omissions, without being aware she had been taught to consider these minor faults as heinous crimes.

Always painfully erect, and always giving voice to equally painful maxims, at the time when this story commences, Lady Katherine could not have pointed out a single person who loved her, out of her own circle; and within that, to the very centre, not one who did not fear her. In addition to her harsh and unloving countenance, she had a very austere way of dressing: with marked features and strong lines, she did not permit her own gray hair to mellow down the ravages of time by its softening influence on each side of her face, but had a wig of very shining black hair, that divided itself into straight black lines on her brown and wrinkled forehead, and then rolled itself, or was rolled, into three great curls, that for smoothness and compactness of shape, could be compared to nothing either elegant or graceful. Then her dresses were all so remarkably stiff and uncompromising, both in color and texture, that it was sufficient to hear them rustle to make her servants and children fly. But now the black wig was gone, and the smooth bands of soft, silver hair came low on her faded cheek, with the edging of rich lace all round, making the withered face look fresh and comely with so fair a frame. And the gentle, pleased expression that had taken the place of the cold, harsh air, did it not tell more than words can describe, that the sweet incense of a Christian heart was implanted within that erect frame; a warm-hearted, childlike spirit now dwelt where only stately propriety had ruled?

It was remarkable that, whereas she had always found fault before, now she was always in a general buzz of praise. Everybody was so kind, everybody was so thoughtful, everybody seemed always to be doing just what was most proper towards everybody. Not the lowest servant about the place, not the meanest beggar she ever saw, not the smallest child she met, but she addressed. Then would she dilate in the twilight evenings upon all he said, and she said, and they said, and John Grey would make comments thereon, while Pru. listened and hemmed small frills. Thus they spent pleasant evenings, and the old lady's heart bloomed and expanded under this new and exciting species of life — at least, it was such to her who had been dead and cold before. This evening they had a great deal to talk about.

It was in this manner these three people lived together; and no wonder, with two such loving, innocent, simple companions, John Grey had all his own way, and twisted and turned them round in the most heartless manner.

Suddenly a rival entered the peaceful home; but John Grey, all unconscious of the hold he would gain over his Pru.-Pru.'s heart, welcomed his son with the greatest delight, while everybody who came to see the little stranger, exclaimed, "John Grey," so quaintly and curiously like his father was he. As he sat by his pale wife's bedside reading the Holy Scripture words to her, he could not but notice how her eyes dwelt fondly on this little image of himself. So kneeling down by the bedside, in a soft whisper, that she only could hear, he said, —

"I thank Thee, O Father, for this new mercy; for sparing the life more dear to me than my own; for giving us another to bring up to thy service. And let the image she has so faithfully given him, be a new impulse to me to cherish and be grateful for such love as hers."

The next event was Lotty's return home from visiting her people, bringing Mr. and Mrs. Frank and the twins with her, and they were, like every one else, truly surprised and amazed at young John Grey.

So the summer came on; and as it passed away, Margaret caught herself wishing that the long days were longer still, she had so much to do: the education of her children, the care of her mother, the ordering of her household; each and all were done, as if each were but the sole business she had. And joined to all these was the well-doing of her large estate, in which not even the cutting down of a tree occurred without her knowledge.

As autumn approached, they had the prospect before them of welcoming home the long absent Millicent and Gerald. It was on a calm soft evening in October, that Margaret was under the walnut avenue, waiting the glad sight of their carriage. Two other figures were strolling up the avenue as well, from whom came many a mirthful sound, and laughter such as rings from little silver bells in a sunshiny heart.

"How merry my little Lotty is!" thought Margaret, as the sounds rose up clear in the silent air, pealing up into the arches of the fine old trees. "And I—I am happy also; yes, truly! I bless God for my life of calm repose, yet never-ceasing employment. Perhaps no rapturous delight is mine; but then in tumultuous overflowing joy there must ever be reaction. We pay in some measure for an overplus. Life must be consistent; an even quantity of joy and sorrow, feasting and mourning, is allotted to each of us, if we would but see it. I must be—I am grateful to thee, O God!"

"Margaret, Margaret, they are coming! we see the carriage!" exclaimed Lotty.

In a few minutes they arrived. They were in each other's arms. Warm, welcome kisses were given and exchanged. The length of their absence seemed atoned for by the delight of their return.

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How much they had to tell, to see, to rejoice at—how much to listen to, of the life and welfare of those they loved so well. Millicent was stronger and better than ever she had felt before, and showed her two little ones with pride and delight. A grave sorrow was in Gerald's eyes; it seemed habitual there; but a gentle smile illumined his face, with an expression they remembered not in him. It was full of love and humility.

"Lotty! Margaret is almost like her old self," said Milly, in one of the numerous confidences that were taking place among them all.

"Yes; is she not? I look forward to the time when my earliest thought or day-dream will be realized." answered Lotty.

"What is that, Lotty?"

"You know it: at least, if you remember the green-house at Montagu Hall, the rooks going home to their dinner, the old Forest home."

"I remember all this, and say, Basil. But still I cannot guess what you mean."

"You and Margaret must be sisters, indeed."

"Ah! Lotty, I see it is true what Margaret says: you are changed."

"In what way?"

"You must be changed, if you think Margaret would —— nay, I will not say it; much as I honor and love my brother, highly as I venerate and esteem such a character, I trust he will never cast a blot upon it, by seeking to marry Margaret. Tell me, Lotty, surely no such thought has stained his upright mind?"

"Pray, why should it not? what could be more natural, loving her as he did from her childhood?"

"But, Margaret, our Queen Margaret! faultless in all things, she will never — no, I will not believe it, and I wish I had delayed my return home, if Basil intends —— "

"Don't worry yourself. Basil is very far from intending anything of the sort, to my sorrow. I do not like Margaret passing a long and lonely life."

"It is not so to her. She has her mother, her children, her cares and estates, that charming Miss Rachel — lastly, and almost least, you, Lotty."

"How did Margaret tell you I was changed, Milly?"

"She said you no longer laughed merrily, excepting the evening we came home; that you buried yourself in your books, and had become pale and thin; and besides, it was privately whispered to me, that there were strong symptoms the little Bear was come to life again."

"Shall I give you a specimen of his ferocity now, Milly?"

"No, thank you, dear. But, seriously, Margaret is unhappy about you. She thinks you are not pleased that she has taken Miss Rachel to live with her —— "

"Nay, Heaven forbid! Margaret must think her Lotty changed, if she deems her so base as that."

"Then, what is it, Lotty?"

"I will mend my manners, Milly, so that even Gerald shall say I am a true penitent. Think no more of my sins, and let us talk of other things."

"As you like, Lotty. Basil met us at Liverpool, but he would not come on here with us."

"That was unbrotherly."

"We are to spend Christmas with him, then perhaps he may return with us."

"Perhaps, as he will have you to visit."

"Does he come often to see Margaret?"

"I believe so. Whenever she wants advice, he flies down on telegraphic wings, which, I presume, are quicker than winged ones now."

"I thought he had grown handsomer than ever, Lotty."

"I have not seen him these eight or nine months, I believe; unluckily, I was always absent when he came."

"You believe! how coldly you talk, and so fond of Basil as you used to be."

"Yes," said Lotty, yawning, "that was when I was a school-girl; I have become very fond of botany now, and I want Margaret to go to Wales: in Brecknockshire I hear you can find almost every rare wild flower or fern known in great Britain. Think of that, now, Milly."

"Lotty, Lotty! you are a changeling."

"Both Lotties love you, so do not be angry."

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And so at last they all settled into their usual places, and no event of any importance occurred, but that Lotty's mood changed again: from being a cross little irritable Bear, she was now so subdued, so gentle, so loving, in all her ways, no one knew how to make enough of her.

"Bairn, bairn! what for dinna ye clack on wi' yer bit pratty ways?" said Mrs. Laird, who half disliked her change. "Ye're sae saft and sa douce like, and yer een aye fill wi' tears at the first word; bairn, ye hae getten a luik like as of anither warld, and I wad I might be in my cauld grave, ere I lost sight o' ye, for ye air just the darling of old Janet Laird's heart."

"After a naughty fit, it is time to be good, Mammy Laird," answered Lotty.

"Naughty! Weel, bairn, when ye do harm to ere a body in this wicked warld, Janet Laird will turn highway-woman. Ye hae a trouble in yer heart, bairn?"

"Yes, Bear is getting lazy, and loves the fire more than Lotty."

Bear arose, and laying his beautiful head on Lotty's lap, endeavored to blink and wink an indignant denial.

"Aye me! but thon doggie gets mair sensible day by day — he'll be speaking sune. And sae ye wunna tell me yer trouble?"

"I have none, but ——"

"What noo, my heart's bairn?"

"Suppose I should leave you, and go away, would you love me still?"

Mrs. Laird at first sat down stunned, and then she cried bitterly: suddenly, looking at Lotty's face, and seeing it half blushes and half smiles, a light broke into her mind, illuminating the strong Scotch features, bedewed with great tears.

"The Lord bless us! No possible, bairn. Bairn, dinna rin like that. Joost what the doctor and me's been a-praying for. Hoot! the lassie's gane aff like the sna drift, and I'll no catch her. She's joost a bit fairy, wi' her tricks. But I'll aye abide her time. My certie, I'll blithely bide a wee, and whatten a gay laugh I'll hae at the doctor."

"Lotty, love," said Margaret, "why do you make me love you so much? Suppose I had to part from you."

"You would miss me, then?"

"Miss you! my best and dearest Lotty? Ask the flowers if they bloom without their sunbeams; ask the birds if they would sing without their mates."

"Say the word then, and Lotty is yours for life."

"Only in one way could I bear to lose you, Lotty, and that would be no loss, but a blessed gain to me. Two friends doubled fourfold by being one."

"A match-maker! Margaret a match-maker! Since you have broached such an extraordinary subject for you, let me ask you why may not I have the same delight?"

"I do not understand you, Lotty."

"Long ago, nay, when we were yet both at school, I built a fairy castle, in which my Margaret reigned Queen, and ——"

"Go on, Lotty."

"Basil, King, dear Meg," said Lotty, in a low voice.

"Like all school-girls' castles, that was fitly knocked down, Lotty."

"Yes, for a time; but now I should like to rebuild it."

"Is this Lotty speaking to Margaret?"

"Yes, and she wishes an answer."

"How do people answer insults? How am I? Can it indeed be Lotty, my Lotty, who gives me this wound?" and Margaret's face crimsoned with an anger and indignation beautiful to see.

Lotty's eyes were fixed on her; her own face pale as marble.

"Do you know what love is, child?" continued Margaret, with a sort of pitying scorn.

"Yes, for you," breathed Lotty, low and soft.

"Love! where Death's grim, cold clutch is as the touch of your first child's lips, so he spares the beloved one. Love! that pervades the heart, until earth, sea, sky, and universe seem too small to hold it. A love that the grave so hallows, the lonely one lives on faithfulness, and requires no other food. But stay, you never loved, Lotty."

"I have a love within me," answered Lotty, "more strong than that; for life is a trifle to offer at its shrine, in comparison to what I am ready to give. Now, answer me but this one question, Margaret, then spurn your Lotty if you will. You are now twenty-four years of age; you have a long life before you. You are full of woman's best and sweetest virtues, more fitted than any one I ever saw for wife and mother. Say, can you doom to a desolate hearth and lonely home a man whom you have known and liked from childhood; whose nature is so true to your own; who gave his young heart, as you know, into your keeping, until forced to tear its very life-pulse out; whose every thought is noble and good; who is bound to you by ties of cordial sympathy, and by the joint interest of your children; say, Margaret, would you refuse to marry this man?"

"Did Lord Erlscourt desire you to speak to me?" answered Margaret, in a voice so strange, so cold, Lotty looked up in wonder.

"No! O no!" exclaimed Lotty. "Basil knows nothing; I ask for myself alone."

"I thank God, yes, I thank thee, O God! that he still remains the friend and brother I require. How could I doubt him?" continued Margaret joyfully; "how could I belie for one moment his noble nature? But for you, you, Lotty, who ought to have known better than even Basil himself, that if Margaret loved once, it was forever; but in that love she cast all she had; how am I to answer you? The natural love of a mother binds me to life; the bounty and mercy of God have given me tasks to do, which leave but little time for murmurings. I am blest in the hope of executing all my Harold's wishes, leaving his name untarnished and his children beloved. I am twice gifted in having the affections of those around me, and bestowing on them in return all the love I have left. I say in the morning, 'Praise God;' and at night I whisper my prayer of thanksgiving for a contented heart, a cheerful spirit. I go about the world, I enter with pleasure into all that interests others. Yet, Lotty,

"'Neither the angels that live in heaven above,
Or the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul'

of my Harold. You are answered. Farewell!"

Margaret turned away, her fair face flushed and excited, her step and air like a mourning, injured queen; but already the inspired eyes looked up into the viewless air, and ere Lotty lost sight of her, the fair fingers laced themselves together. Margaret was in spirit communing with her Harold.

"She will forgive me soon," murmured Lotty; "she will guess her Lotty had a motive." And she went and sat down in one of the quaint old summer-houses which commanded a view of the path Margaret had taken. Bear showed no sort of sympathy with Lotty's silent mood, but gambolled about in high gusto, as if all the world were charmed with each other, and no breeze had heard the first words of estrangement between Margaret and Lotty.

A soft, hurried light was in Lotty's eyes, and a smile came to her lips as she heard the words, "Lotty! Lotty!" rising on the air. Margaret had not been gone half an hour, after taking that leave of Lotty, almost, as it were forever, and here she was flying back with swift footfall, calling on her urgently.

Lotty came forward, slowly and shyly. But the instant Margaret saw her, she ran to her, and lifting up the little blushing face, kissed it again and again, saying, "I wondered, and was so hurt, so vexed, and I cried bitterly, and I said, 'that Lotty should think thus of me, Lotty who loves me so.' Then came her words ringing into my memory, as if pealed from the boughs above me: 'I have a love within me, more strong than yours, for life is a trifle to offer at its shrine, in comparison to what I am ready to give.' I believe it. Thank God! Lotty, I need not the sacrifice. Now, you know this, you feel it — nay, turn not away, but bless your Margaret by saying you are happy."

"I am happy."

"I know all now," said Margaret, going on; "everything is plain, that was so enigmatical before. But, Lotty, dearest, most unselfish, most matchless Lotty, now my castle will be built, my dream will come true; your Margaret's only wish will be gratified. But when may I speak openly? I feel sure you have been a cruel, remorseless, unfeeling Lotty, and you must be brought to reason immediately."

"Now don't, Meg; how could I think you would be so silly?"

"I like to be silly — I will be so. Ah, Bear! your day is over. Do not fancy you are the best beloved ——"

"No!" interrupted Lotty, hastily. "Bear knows that Lotty is silly enough to like an unkind Margaret the best."

"I will not be unkind. No, Bear; for the first and last time, Margaret and Lotty have misunderstood each other; and time is too precious for me to suffer a moment of estrangement now. Who knows how soon I may lose her? Who can tell what changes a day may bring forth? As the miser hoards his gold, as the prisoner cherishes the fresh air, so must I hold and love my treasure while she is mine."

"I will never leave you, if you wish it, Queen Meg."

"Perhaps I may demand the sacrifice; but wait until I do."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

So the fourteenth of February came again.

"My Lotty, are you not early? the clock has only just struck six," said the sleepy Margaret, as Lotty rose to take her morning's walk.

"Good night, then, and go to sleep again," answered Lotty; "because, Bear," continued she, when in her dressing-room, "we must get out of the way, and hide ourselves. It won't do for us to go and meet anybody this morning — we must be there first."

But somebody seemed to know with whom he had to deal. For, again, as Lotty passed out in the dark morning, did she hear the words, low and tender, —

"Is this my Lotty?"

Bear gave a short, deep tone of recognition and delight, — a mode of expression he never indulged in but on extraordinary occasions. But there was no other sound.

"Is this my Lotty?" again was heard, in accents this time troubled and sad.

A little hand was put into Basil's; he clasped it with a force that almost crushed it into nothing, and, with a cry of irresistible happiness, drew the slight form, for one brief moment, close to his heart. Then, with one arm round her, he bore her swiftly to the cedar walk. There, on that Valentine's Day, before even the birds were awake to settle their own betrothments, words of love and vows of constancy had been given and exchanged; and the sun broke out in high refulgence, as if to ratify the contract with his bright presence.

Margaret had not followed Lotty's advice, and turned to sleep again. On the contrary, she also rose early, and as the lovers crossed the lawn from the cedar walk, they saw her sweet face anxiously watching from the breakfast-room window. They could see her happy start, they knew she disappeared only to meet them at the garden door, and, ere they thought she could be there, she was out, shawlless and bonnetless, but glowing with so much delight, she heeded not the keen February air.

"My Lotty! — dear Basil! — tell me quickly, am I to associate evermore two such loved names as one?"

"I have caught her at last, Margaret; but, unless I have your help, she may escape me yet; she is the most wilful ——"

"Dearest, sweetest, best Lotty in the world," interrupted Margaret.

"I grant it, she is all that, and much more, and I will tell her so, as soon as ever she has told you she loves me. I must have a witness, Margaret; and until your hear her say it, I am not sure of her."

"You must give her time, Basil."

"Time, dear Margaret! I asked her to marry me two years ago, and she has never vouchsafed me a civil word or kind look since. Judge if I have not reason to be alarmed."

All this time, it was beautiful to see Margaret caressing and fondling the little blushing, shy thing, and most wonderful to behold the glowing delight of Basil, expressed in his radiant eyes and smiles. But Lotty would say nothing he required. She said, "Bear loved him, and she did not dislike him;" and with that he was forced to be content.

So now Margaret took Lotty up stairs, that she might take off her walking things, and prepare for breakfast; and she hovered about her, and waited upon her, as a nurse waits upon the petted child.

"Two years! — how could you be so cruel, Lotty?"

"I did not know — I could not tell — I have been very unhappy," murmured Lotty.

"Ah, my best one, all for me! How lucky it was that I was so hurt and angry. Then you must have been convinced. But turn, Lotty, look at me with your dear, most truthful eyes. Confess to your Margaret that now you know what love is.

Now you can feel that all she said was the living, naked truth. Once love truly, 'tis love forever. Now comfort your Margaret by saying you feel and know it; then she will forgive herself for ever being cross to her Lotty, or misunderstanding her."

"I feel, I know it," whispered Lotty, blushing and trembling, and then trying to look defiant and indifferent.

"Of all the things that could happen to me in this world, nothing ever pleased me more, or could benefit me so much. Don't you see, Lotty, you have now given me a real brother? Now I may make use of Basil's services twice as much again as I have lately done, because, you know, Lotty, the world is such a strange one — so rude, so far from generous."

"There is the breakfast-bell, Queen Meg."

They went down together, and, as they opened the door, Basil met them. Lady Montagu and Miss Rachel were also in the room. Without the smallest preparation, but with the greatest coolness, and, as Lotty afterwards said, "impudence," Basil at once took her hand, and leading her up to the two ladies, said, "Allow me to introduce to you my future wife. I am obliged to do this," continued he, apologetically, "not only because I am impatient for all the world to congratulate me on my happiness, but I wish it to be as publicly known as possible, that she may not retract."

They were quite as much charmed as he meant them to be, and in the state of excitement into which they all fell, breakfast ran great danger of being utterly forgotten.

"But I cannot think, Basil, why you have been so cold and indifferent to her all this time," said Lady Montagu, "telling me, as you do, how long you have loved her."

"I was obeying her wishes, as I supposed. She had a purpose in her heart, and I had one in mine. We each took our own methods of fulfilling our secret wishes, and I certainly think I have shortened my probation by the excessive care I took to show I was indifferent to her. Now, my Lotty, confess, the more I was a wretch and hypocrite, the more you thanked and loved me!"

"You will upset the cream-jug, if you are so fidgety," was all Lotty's answer.

"Margaret, have you any message to Rose Leigh? I must run across for a private business of my own."

"Now, Basil," began Lotty.

"What, my Lotty?" answered he, turning his beaming, smiling eyes upon her, and enjoying her confusion. "Nay, you must let me be the bearer of my own good news. You have had your way for two years; give me this one day, and you shall have two years more."

"A bargain," said Lotty.

"We will seal it," answered he, "on a fitting occasion."

As Basil entered the drawing-room at Rose Leigh, every one of the inmates exclaimed, as they looked at him.

"What good news do you bring us?" said Lady Katherine.

"Dear, dear!—what charming thing has happened?" said Pru.

"He is going to be married!" cried John Grey; and to add force to his words, down went his hand with such hearty good will on the table, that all the cups, saucers, spoons, and forks skipped up in indignation.

"Nothing but matrimony could make him look thus; I did just the same, my Pru.-Pru."

"He does look happy," said Lady Katherine; "but I hope he is not going to be married; we cannot spare him to a stranger."

"It is not a stranger," said Basil, more radiant than ever.

"Mrs. Leigh," exclaimed John Grey; and down went the hand on the table again, and the forks and spoons skipped higher than before.

"Lotty, sweet, dear, darling Lotty! Say it is Lotty, and none will rejoice as we do."

Of course, they must instantly start off to kiss and bless her.

"Wait for your wrapper, mamma," urged Pru.

"Stay, my Pru.-Pru., until I procure your clogs," commanded John Grey.

"I must go at once to bless the darling child!" exclaimed Lady Katherine.

"My sweet, darling Lotty!" said Pru., half crying, half laughing.

But Margaret knew what they would wish, and had anticipated them. There she was in the door-way, and behind they caught a glimpse of a little figure. How she was kissed, congratulated, and blessed! How they wondered, and rejoiced, and chattered; leading one to imagine that Lotty had been born for no other purpose than to marry Lord Erlscourt, and that the whole world had leagued themselves in terrible array, for months and years, to prevent the marriage. But that he, with the courage and fortitude of the celebrated young man in the Arabian Nights, had surmounted time, difficulties, and troubles, as great as his, in the journey to the unknown islands of Wak-Wak, and like him, had rescued and recovered his winged and beautiful bride.

CHAPTER LXXV.

"I WISH to know, Basil, how you came to think of loving me?" asked Lotty.

"I wish to know, my Lotty, how I could help it?" said Basil in return.

"But you knew very little of me before; that is, you know, you had so many things on which to bestow your attention, I never imagined you had any for me."

"I am sorry to make myself out such a hypocrite then, for I do not think I ever missed a word you said, or anything you did. I am too happy now to tell you what I endured when I heard of that hasty marriage; for I then found out that I was not smitten with your prettiness, or your sweet wilful ways, but that I had reckoned upon trying to win the affections that would be to me the true and only panacea for my early disappointment."

"Ah, don't be too sure. You cannot think how wicked I can be, if I choose."

"Be as wicked as you like, I shall only be too glad to punish you, and I shall be very glad if you will give me a specimen now, as I have a punishment all ready, which I am dying to inflict."

"Nay, tell me the punishment first."

"I should carry you off to church, and marry you on the spot."

"That is too severe. I am sure Flo. would pity me, if again I had no opportunity of being married in a grand dress, and having a trousseau."

"Do you know, Lotty, I feel for once in my life pleased with and grateful to Mrs. Bankes. The alternative between her offer and mine, I imagine, gave me a favorable lift, at a time I most required it, for you are so wilful, Lotty."

"I see no wilfulness in my wish not to burden you with a wife, whom, perhaps, after a year's marriage, you would have discovered you did not love as you loved before."

"Come, now, that is a very wicked speech; you must be punished."

"Bear, Bear!" cried Lotty, struggling from his grasp.

"It is of no use your calling Bear, for he has been my confidant these two years, and gave his consent long before you did."

"I won't submit to be kissed in the public road, whenever you choose."

"Then I will wait until we get into Mrs. Laird's drawing-room, for punished you must be."

Lotty, however, gained the victory; for, instead of following him into the drawing-room, she was up the stairs and out of sight before he could catch her.

Mrs. Laird, upon hearing the news, sat down and cried like a child, which she said was all for joy.

Then they all adjourned to Court Leigh, and there the business of the day began. Lotty was to receive her presents, and read innumerable letters, while many more had to be written, so that Basil grew very impatient at all this monopolizing of his Lotty.

When the dinner hour approached, Mr. and Mrs. Laird appeared — she in brilliant satin and Limerick lace cap, and he in his best apparel, with his wig put on quite straight, to do honor to the day.

"My bairn, what hae ye gotten in that bonnie box?" said Mrs. Laird, as she took her wrapper off, in Lotty's room.

"Lord Erlscourt's birthday present, ma'am, to me."

"And whatna a sort of present is it, my bonnie bairn?" said Mrs. Laird, eagerly.

"I have not looked at it yet?"

"Ech me, to hear that noo! For my sake open it, and let me see, bairn."

Lotty drew forth a long necklace of golden links, that matched her bracelets; but like dew-drops on a hot summer's night, lay a lustrous diamond on each link.

"Ech me, but yon man's a princely giver! My word, but them's matchless, bairn, and sae just fitting for you!"

The little, small, white throat gleamed with sparkling beauty, for Mrs. Laird insisted on her wearing it this one night. And as they looked at and admired the way in which the bright circlet set off Lotty's fairy beauty, Mrs. Laird whispered to my Lord, —

"I dinna think, my Laird, ye hae matched her eyes, yet."

"I quite agree with you," said he in return.

* * * * * *

The state of commotion into which the Beauvillian line fell, was wonderful. This was a proper match for their girl. It should be celebrated as such a marriage deserved.

The settlements offered by Lord Erlscourt were munificent. What they meant to give back in return should be proportionate. But above all things in the world, one thing pleased them — their girl looked radiantly happy, and she had whispered in her brother Norman's ear that she loved at last. Nothing should mar the celebration of this wedding, at all events. It was to take place at the village church of Beau Court. Her eldest brother charged himself with all the arrangements and expenses thereof, while other brothers took other duties, and uncles and cousins came in to help. And while all these events were occurring, and the whole country in a commotion, there sat in a little back street in London, in a little dingy parlor, a lady, — that is, she did not look much like a lady, for she was in a dressing-gown, with disordered hair, slippers down at heel, and what appeared to be an unwashed face; and she was warming herself by the fire, seated in anything but an elegant attitude, and reading the newspaper with anything but amiable feelings.

"Humph! Here is our old gentleman appointed one of the governors of the Bank of England, and yet he suffers a son like Fred. to live in such odious lodgings, with half the pittance we ought to have, because we got a little into debt. It is all very well Fred. saying that he helped us three times, and that he won't sit and listen to me abusing his father, — but he shall hear my mind. I am not going to be drowned by any of them. I have made him suffer pretty well for not allowing me that new bonnet; though, to be sure, I have found it very dull moping here all by myself of an evening. But it is no fault of mine. He said I should not have the bonnet, because his father would think his promises of retrenchment false if he saw me going about with such a handsome thing — and so it was, a love, and so becoming. And I said he should have no dinner until I had it. No more he shall, here. He may go and dine on a miserable mutton-chop in the city, for I have taken good care he shall not have above a shilling in his pocket when he goes out, that I may be able to tell his stingy old father that I am economical, at all events. Jupiter Ammon! what do I see in the court news ——

"'Lord Erlscourt about to lead to the hymeneal altar the beautiful Mrs. Leigh, of High Leigh, Cheshire.'

"The little, sly, unkind thing! Never to tell me, or to say one word. Or I wonder has she cut Margaret out. Dear me! Perhaps it is a mistake. No! it cannot be. They say, early in

May, the marriage takes place. I will write her — to be sure I will; I will offer my services to select her trousseau. This time it will be a fitting one, I hope. I will write her such a letter, that she cannot help asking me to the wedding. Then I must have that bonnet to go there. I will send a note into the city to Fred., to say he may come to dinner — poor fellow! I long to talk over the news with him. I will send out now and get him a nice beefsteak, and a slice of cod, to be ready by half past six, with some scalloped oysters. Won't he enjoy it?"

Mrs. Bankes did all she intended, and welcomed dear Fred. very warmly. But she was disappointed in seeing him enjoy the feast she had prepared for him. He hardly tasted a mouthful of fish, he said it was so woolly; and he turned up his nose at the beefsteak —there was no Worcester sauce to it; and the scalloped oysters had no cayenne pepper in them.

"Why, Fred., after dining on nothing in the city for the last three days, I certainly thought you would have been grateful for this nice feast that I had prepared for you."

"I did not dine in the city."

"Good heavens! I hope you have not been running up a bill at some club."

"No, of course not; I always dined with my father."

We will draw a veil over Mrs. Bankes's discomfiture.

No wonder "dear Fred." could eat nothing at home.

Père Bankes was celebrated even in London for his French cook.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

Gerald, at Lotty's request, was to marry them. But Basil said he must have John Grey to "assist," because, without regarding the fashion, as it now seemed to be, he deemed it would certainly require the offices of two clergymen to bind such a little myth, such a wilful, wayward thing, in the bands of holy matrimony.

"But," said John Grey, "I have heard a strange story, a word missed — or rather not heard — it is thought, unuttered in the marriage service; I give due notice, unless I hear every syllable distinct and plain, I shut my book and ——"

"Make yourself very disagreeable," retorted Lotty.

"I shall do it," said the good John, his eyes twinkling, "as sure as I love my Pru.-Pru."

"There is an idea running loose about the world, which ventures to insinuate you love Lady Katherine more than Pru.-Pru."

"An idea I glory in," laughed he. "I must away to tell it to my Pru.-Pru."

Lotty duly received Mrs. Bankes's letter, and returned for answer, that she was much obliged for all her kind congratulations and offers of assistance. But she was sure Flo. would be glad to hear she was having a very proper and correct trousseau prepared for her; and believed that this time she should certainly be married in a wedding-dress. Nevertheless, she took no notice of the broad hint, purporting Mrs. Bankes's ready acceptance of an invitation to the interesting ceremony.

So Mrs. Bankes wrote again; and this time pointedly expressed her ardent wish to be present, on an occasion so peculiarly trying to her dearest and ever-beloved Lotty; and wound up with a list of the various talents she could bring to bear, so as to render her presence both agreeable and highly convenient. Whereupon Lotty returned for answer, that she had no power to give any invitations, and recommended Flo. to comfort herself with the reflection, that it must necessarily be a very indifferent sort of an affair, because of her having been married before. No white gloves, no white dress, no favors, not even bride-cake. She was sure she was doing a kind act, sparing Flo. the infliction of witnessing such a mutilated ceremony, &c., &c.

But the good Beauvillians were not at all disposed to be inhospitable on such an occasion, and had already settled that every single individual who had ever had a liking, or glimpse, or interest in "their girl" should be invited, even if all her schoolfellows chose to be of the number. They had room enough and to spare among the numerous kindred; and accordingly upon Mrs. Frank fell the lot to invite not only Mr. and Mrs. Bankes, but Mr. and Mrs. Royston.

When Carry first received the invitation, a little clause had been somewhat advisedly inserted in the letter. "So large an assemblage was expected, Mrs. Frank was much afraid she had no room to spare for children; in fact, if possible (she must beg them to excuse her apparent inhospitality through the urgency of the peculiar circumstance), she would be greatly obliged if they brought but one servant."

No children! For the first time in her life since she had been a mother, was such a proposal made to her. Of course she could not go. The grandest wedding in the world would not tempt her to leave her darlings.

"I wish you would accept it, Carry, dear," said her husband, with an eagerness rather unusual in him.

"What! can you leave your horses and dogs?" demanded she.

"Yes, Carry, I have taken a great fancy to go, and you will oblige me much by accepting the invitation. I can assure you, it is a sad life I lead, going about from place to place, as if I was a bachelor, and had neither wife nor children."

Carry's heart smote her, as she heard these unwonted tones from her rough 'squire.

"I will accept; and then if any of the children should be ill, or likely to fret, you can take my excuses."

"Thank you, Carry, for conceding so much," answered he, rewarding her after his own boisterous fashion.

Perhaps 'Squire Royston would not have succeeded in his wishes, but for a letter Carry received from Flo., as follows·—

"My dear Caroline:

"Of course you have heard of the splendid match my dear Lotty is about to make. The ceremony is to take place, after Easter, on the 23d of April, and I am extremely busy preparing all my little matters. For, of course, dearest Lotty insists on my attending the wedding, which, however inconvenient, I could not deny her. You may rely upon my sending you every particular; I shall make a point of writing to you immediately after the ceremony, which you may be sure shall lose nothing in *éclât* from my presence. I hear that all the world are asked, and every house in the neighborhood is to be crammed; but, of course, I shall be near the bride — in fact, under the same roof. I suppose you will not leave the darling children, otherwise, I dare say, I could get you an invitation. However, be assured I will not forget you, and remain ever, your affectionate schoolfellow and friend, Florentia Bankes."

Flo. always signed herself thus, when on "stilts," as Lotty termed her grand modes.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Royston, indignantly, after reading the letter, "if that is not the most impudent ——" But perhaps it is as well to leave to the imagination all the 'squire said. "Now, Carry, if you don't go, after reading that letter, I — I'll — yes, I will; that is, I shall have to go and horsewhip Bankes."

"O, dear Robert, be calm, he might call you out—there might be a duel; if my poor children should be fatherless ——"

"Come, don't cry; as regards my fatherly attentions, they won't miss much, but that is your own fault, Carry. I am not allowed to touch my children, lest I should crack 'em or damage 'em."

"I think I will certainly accompany you now, Robert; that is, if all the darlings remain well."

"I devoutly hope they will, then; and I'll tell you what I'll do. As we are only to take one servant, that will be your maid, of course, and I will leave my man, Bendeth, to ride every morning to the station, and telegraph down how the young pups are."

"Pups!"

"Children, I mean, Carry."

"O! thank you, dear Robert—how thoughtful and kind of you. Certainly, I promise to go now. I like Flo.'s impertinence, indeed; Lotty was quite as partial to me as to her."

"She is not what I take her to be, if she is not a deal more fond of you. That Mrs. Bankes is ——" But again we pause.

So the important day came; they were invited to appear on the 20th, that they might have three days' enjoyment of Lotty's society beforehand.

Lucky it was for the 'squire, that they were soon puffing away on the railroad; for the first half hour Carry was very tearful, and had she been in an ordinary carriage with horses, might have turned back. But he ensconced her safely in a first-class, and was so attentive, and endeavored to make himself so agreeable, that having a really tender heart, Carry could not but dry up her tears and be comforted, out of very gratitude for such unwonted exertions on the 'squire's part.

By and by the excitement of the journey, the freedom from maternal anxieties, the number of miles that were now inevitably placed between her and her darlings, had their due effect, and she began to smile and enjoy herself quite like the Carry of bridal days.

"I say, Carry, I never told you what I did, my last trip to town. I know you seldom think of yourself, so I went to your milliner's, and ordered you a few nice dresses, and head-gear, and such like. Of course, I did not venture to use my own taste, but I told Mrs. Atkins, if you liked them, and looked nice in them, I would pay her bill within the month; but if she palmed off any of her trash to me, she might whistle for her money for the next two years. That's the way I serve my tailor, Carry."

"O Robert, how kind you are! Why, I always thought you cared for nothing but horses and dogs."

"Humph! Well, I am rather given that way; but still, does it not strike you, Carry, that a change comes over one now and then? I don't think I can pass all my life in the dog and horse line, eh, Carry?"

"No, Robert, I should hope not."

"And yet, Carry, when I do stop at home, what happens?"

Carry blushed, and was uneasy.

"Never mind, I don't want to upbraid. If you are pretty happy this visit, perhaps you and I may come to some sort of a bargain for the future, and each give way a little. But here is Swindon — now what will you have?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Then I'll go and see after the luggage, and get a glass of wine for myself."

He, however, soon came back, his handkerchief almost concealing his face, while he indulged in hearty but suppressed laughing.

"They are here, Carry, in the train with us. By the Lord Harry! I would not miss her seeing you at Gloucester for a mint of money; keep close, Carry, we will have a Siddonain scene then. It was so lucky she is such a chatterpie. I was just going into the refreshment-room, when I heard her haranguing poor 'Fred.' Such a dressing as she gave him, for leaving her exposed to the gaze of the multitude. She had brought a maid with her — it was her business to look after the luggage, not his. Heaven help that poor little mannikin! he is properly henpecked."

The 'squire was so pleased with the idea of what was to come, that he had not ceased laughing when they arrived. Carry having the advantage of foreknowledge, was fully prepared for the interview at Gloucester station; but Flo.'s start and exclamation fully answered Mr. Royston's expectations.

"My heavens, Carry! what are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to Lotty's wedding," answered Carry, composedly.

"And who asked you?" exclaimed Flo., with an effort, endeavoring to hide her discomfiture.

"The same person that asked you — Mrs. Frank Beauvilliers. I thought it useless to answer your letter, as I should have the pleasure of seeing you soon," continued Carry, with spirit.

Flo. was for once silenced and put down. But not for long.

"Flo.," said Mr. Bankes, "how many boxes have you?"

"Five," she answered.

"Then one has gone to Exeter; it was all your fault ——"

"Gracious heavens, Frederick! then you must go instantly after it!—How dare you be so careless and good-for-nothing!" continued she, turning to the unfortunate maid.

"I will do nothing of the sort," answered Fred.; "we will telegraph, if you like; but as it was all your own doing, I'll thank you to scold no more."

Snubbed by Fred., what further indignity was she to suffer?

* * * * * *

They had a very kind welcome from Mrs. Frank, and a truly Beauvillian one from Mr. Frank, and in a genial glow of half-bustle and half-happiness, they were hurried up stairs to dress and prepare for an evening party. Mr. and Mrs. Frank were "at home" that night to all the Beauvilliers.

If ever there was a fresh, clean, beautiful, well-ordered, well-appointed house, it was Mr. and Mrs. Frank's. Bright, blazing fires, neat-handed, swift-footed, smiling little handmaids, beautiful toilette appointments, green-painted spacious baths, and a general pervading scent of freshness and lavender, put every one into a high state of comfort and delight.

Flo. had recovered her assurance, and being promised her missing box by the next day, was in high good humor.

"Really," said she to 'dear Fred.,' "I must go and see what Carry is about to wear. I cannot have her disgrace herself and us, by anything dowdy. Luckily I have brought more than I shall want, and can lend her a headdress."

But the amount of finery spread out in all its glory on Carry's bed, sent her back tamed and subdued for the evening.

"Think of Mr. Royston making her such magnificent presents, and she knowing nothing about it, my dear Fred., until she opened the box; and I never gave the man credit for a morsel of taste. A silk dress, Fred., *couleur D'Abricot*, with such black lace flounces, and pomegranates for the hair, and a blue *moire*. O Fred., Fred.! just the dress I am dying for, and the most beautiful brocade for the wedding-day. Well, one comfort is, however handsome Carry's dress, she must look a dowdy, she is such a figure. Law! before I'd be so fat— There! I declare that must be a carriage at the door — make haste; of all things I like to watch the company being ushered in; it is such a good time to look over their dresses."

There was a goodly assemblage of the Beauvillian family, and a very fine set they were to look at, but out of compliment to Lord Erlscourt, the whole of his family were asked to Beau Court, and were now being ushered in, under the strict surveillance of Mrs. Bankes.

"I suppose that is my lady," whispered she to Carry, who looked very pretty and nice in her blue *moire*, rather to Flo.'s astonishment, and highly to the 'squire's delight and admiration. "Well, I don't think much of her. She may have been handsome, but is quite *passée;* bless me! there's my Lord as deferential to her as if she was his own mother."

"O Flo.! what handsome girls those are! I declare I think they must be the Miss Erles, and so prettily dressed. Coral looks so well with white muslin."

"My dear, I suppose they must be the Miss Erles, they look just like gypsies ——"

"O! Flo., that must be Margaret; see the beautiful head, half turned away. Now we shall see dear, dear Lotty."

"My heavens! if there is not that old Scotchwoman, with a gown and cap more staring than ever."

"Do you think, Flo., that nice-looking, ladylike person, talking so happily to the gentleman in black, is ——"

"Why, it is Miss Leigh that was. How matrimony has improved her."

"Mrs. Frank's sister: no wonder she is nice then. I never saw a person I liked so much, and Robert is in such admiration of their house, and to-morrow I am to see the twins." Carry paused and sighed.

Luckily the 'squire passed by, and took the opportunity of whispering, "You look twenty per cent. prettier than she does." The *she* was indicated by a look.

"Here are the Erle boys; dear me! what fine, handsome young men they are grown. And see, there are dear Lotty and Margaret, too; they are coming towards us."

"How lovely Margaret looks," exclaimed Carry.

"Black velvet is always becoming," responded Flo., "but I declare Lotty looks like a little child, in that white muslin frock, and clinging so to Margaret."

Their schoolfellows now greeted them, and Mr. Royston observed with much pleasure, and no little pride, that both Lotty and Margaret told Carry they thought it very kind of her to come, as they knew she must feel a great deal at leaving her children. Also, in the course of the evening, he observed that

Lord Erlscourt asked her to dance, a favor he did not grant Flo. And further, he overheard Brian remarking to Hugh, —

"I did not know Mrs. Royston, did you?"

"No, she looks as young again, without that horrid baby."

The next day they were all expected at Beau Court, and the company mustered more than ever. Lotty's trousseau was to be displayed, settlements to be signed, and various little matters to be done, that are always requisite on the eve of a wedding. The number of Mrs. Beauvilliers appeared to be continually on the increase, until it became a hopeless matter to distinguish which was which.

Lotty seemed to cling still closer to Margaret; and though again in her simple white frock, an expression, half-awe, half-fear, wholly sweet and tender, took from her face the childish look, and told but too truly that a woman's heart dwelt beneath. In a few hours she would have to promise vows, a love to last until death, a compact that only the grave would dissolve. To that little, faithful, truthful, magnanimous heart, this was no light task. Life or death could offer no more solemn act.

Margaret had laid aside her usual black robes for this evening and the morrow. A full, flowing robe of silver gray swept its graceful folds around her; a few delicate white roses clustered in the dark hair, and falling in long wreaths upon her fair neck, added such a queenly beauty to her appearance, that the spectators gazed only to gaze again, for fear the lovely vision might be seen no more.

Lady Katherine rustled about in a silk that would have stood of itself, without her upright and stately old figure to support it.

Mrs. Laird's satin was certainly gorgeous, and if she had procured another for the ceremony of the next day, green spectacles would be required to endure the blaze. Mrs. Royston looked even prettier than the night before, in the *couleur D'Abricot*, and black lace flounces. It was Mrs. Bankes who looked the dowdy, thought the 'Squire. The Miss Erles were handsomer than ever, in flowing white tarletan, looped up with moss roses.

But as for describing all the company, and all their dresses, and all they said and did, only the able pen of the chronicler of the celebrated marriage of Sir Charles and Lady Grandison can do that. A full and particular account of the *trousseau* might be given; but then so varied, so different, so wonderful are people's tastes, such a description might incur a great deal of censure.

The sight of it was, however, properly appreciated by those who did see it; and none showed their sense of such a favor in a more pointed and particular manner than Mrs. Bankes. She gazed at everything, touched all the silks, examined all the flowers, inspected the laces, counted the gloves and handkerchiefs, passed her opinion upon the whole; and, after a long and eloquent dissertation upon *trousseaux* in general, and this one in particular, and the shock she had endured when she had learned that Lotty's first marriage had been concluded without this indispensable and never-ought-to-be-omitted marriage article, and highly necessary part of the ceremony; she was now bound to confess that the omission had been amply repaired — in fact, it was a wonder how so small a thing could require so vast a wardrobe. However, Lotty had nothing to do with that, and had only selected, out of all the things presented for her choice, a habit: Mrs. Bankes, not knowing this, of course gave Lotty credit for exquisite taste and judgment; but, properly speaking, the praise all belonged to the Beauvillians. The evening was further remarkable for the presentation of innumerable quantities of presents, which it would be endless to mention here.

However, a glad smile was seen stealing over the little, pale, somewhat anxious face of the bride as Bear appeared, and with infinite delicacy both of touch and judgment, as befitted such a gentleman, he laid on her lap a small parcel. Outside, it was directed "for Lotty," and a furtive glance at Brian, showed that Lotty recognized his handwriting. Inside was written "Bear's present," and the writing this time made Lotty glance at Hugh.

Certainly Bear had shown great taste in his present: they were bracelets, consisting of two rows of single pearls, and on the clasp of one was a tiny likeness of such a handsome face, with fair curls and speaking eyes, that seemed to say, whichever way she turned them, "I love you, Lotty."

Brian and Hugh underwent a pantomimic act of self-congratulation, as they saw Lotty's brilliant blush of pleasure, and the quick, shy way in which she concealed her treasure; on the other was a most amiable, but canine visage, with deep, loving eyes it is true, but they only said, "I am Bear, what do you want with me?" Lotty kissed this portrait openly, and then kissed Bear, and said, "Go and thank them for me, Bear." Which Bear tried to do; but Brian and Hugh would have no thanks by proxy. Said they to Bear, "We will wait until to-morrow, then Basil has given us leave — ah! you know what, don't you, old fellow!" Then Queen Margaret put her present into Lotty's hand; and it was a necklace to match the bracelets, but the clasp was deep blue enamel, with five large pearls confidingly resting on the bright surface, as if they were aware how the royal color showed off their matchless form and hue; but Margaret touched a little spring — the blue sea, with its fair freight, disappeared, and there was a fairer pearl within — the lovely, loving face of Margaret.

Ah! Lotty was pleased, and she almost rose from her seat, and looked round for Basil, that he might join in her delight. He was close by, and his fair curls mixed with her dark ones, as she whispered her pleasure at that, and something else hidden in her hand — the honest face of Bear was permitted to lie exposed to every eye.

"Ask Margaret to show you a present she had to-day," said Basil.

Margaret smilingly unclasped a brooch, something like the clasp of Lotty's necklace, and, touching a spring as before, a bewitching little well-known face, with the curls all rumpled, as if the fingers had been running through them, with dazzling, glorious eyes, looking as if they said, "My Queen Margaret." Lotty beheld herself.

"How could you have it taken without my knowing?" she said, blushing at its beauty, and laughing at Margaret's pleasure.

"It was copied from the picture your poor father had taken of you, just before you went to school."

"Then that makes it so childish-looking," said Lotty.

"It is exactly like my Lotty at present, only her hair is perhaps in better curl."

"Curl indeed!" said Lotty, beginning to look saucy, and then becoming more shy than ever.

"So Mrs. Bankes did get here, after all, Margaret," said Basil, for he found it ineffectual to provoke Lotty any further.

"Yes, Pro. was so kind as to ask her, and really, Basil, upon the whole, she has been very good this evening; and as for Carry, she is as nice as possible."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

For twenty miles and more round Beau Court, no one sat still on this eve of the twenty-third of April, and it was supposed that few went to bed that night, for fear they should be too late in the morning. Everybody was to be at church at eleven o'clock; but previous to that, Lord Erlscourt had sent up to inquire of the numerous handmaidens, if he might be permitted a few moments' conversation with his bride. If all the reports of her appearance in her bridal dress were true, it was, indeed, only judicious that he should see her, ere he met her at the altar. Every fresh person who came flying down the stairs, declared that never had such an exquisite little bride been seen before. Basil entered Lotty's presence for the first time, on the morning so eventful to them both, as a bridegroom should.

Serious and subdued in manner, as if he knew God was about to bestow on him one of his best, fairest, noblest gifts, yet did a serene joy beam from his eyes. He knew full well that no light words were spoken between them; and while he could hardly restrain his happiness, that at last he had not only gained the little wild thing to be his own sweet wife forever, but that her heart was wholly and entirely placed in his keeping, yet did he know one little regret, one sad thought afflicted her—she was no longer to be all in all to her Margaret. It was true, that her marriage gave Margaret the greatest happiness she could now know; but such was Lotty's love for her, one word of regret spoken would have proved that their love passed all other; and this word even Basil would have forgiven, for Margaret's sake.

Certainly none of the partial judges of Lotty in her wedding-dress had overrated her appearance. Basil could have knelt down to admire the exquisite little figure, the lovely, blushing, innocent child-face—

> "A rosebud
> Set with little wilful thorns,
> And sweet as English air could make her."

Her dress was of white lace, purest, finest, most valuable Brussels. That, all the Beauvillians had taken care should be the case. But, as she was not to be wholly in white, beneath she wore a silk slip of a pale pink, that shone through the folds on the lace dress like a blush rose. Round her slight throat gleamed a diamond necklace, on her arms the two matchless bracelets. Over those rich, luxuriant curls was a long, floating, gossamer veil, of such beauty and fineness, that it was fortunate for Lotty a curl or two strayed out of its place, to assist the veil in hiding her face from Basil's delighted gaze. But the "little wilful thorns" showed themselves.

"Don't, Basil; I will not have you stare so at me." And the little, tiny, satined foot made a sort of faint attempt to stamp.

"You may let me look a little, my Lotty, on a sight I never saw before, and may not see again; but I am glad to perceive you have your birthday presents on, because my wedding-gift is to match them." And he showed some cases in his hand.

"This I shall keep a little while longer," he said, displaying a diamond hoop ring; "but this you can wear, my Lotty." And he gave her a brooch of diamonds to match the others. "And this, too," he continued, placing in her hands a circlet for the hair, of diamonds, so large and beautiful that each seemed a separate star.

"Thank you, Basil," said Lotty; but letting them all fall to the ground, she continued, in a low whisper, "but you are sure you do not repent; you love me?"

"Love you! my heart's treasure, my love, my wife-so-soon-to-be! — you do not doubt it?" And he knelt down before her, with his arms clasped round her, so that she might read his truth in his eyes.

She was satisfied apparently, for she drew her veil round her; but he could see the flush of delight that crimsoned face, neck, and arms, even down to the small fingers.

Luckily for the fate of Lotty's dress, Mrs. Beauvilliers and Mrs. Laird came in, and shrieked at Lord Erlscourt's profane touch, more full of love and delight than consideration for her toilet. So he was turned out peremptorily; and when he saw his bride again, the veil was reädjusted, the circlet of star-like diamonds confined the rebellious curls, and, like all the rest of the numerous loving eyes, he thought a little Peri had stepped down from her airy home, "to love and be loved by him" forever.

So the ceremony began, and even John Grey was satisfied, for the clear, flute-like notes, pronouncing the words, "love, honor, and obey," were heard at the other end of the church.

After it was over, every Beauvillian would have deemed himself aggrieved and injured if they had not one salute from the bride; and as for Brian and Hugh, they, of course, being bridegroomsmen, had the first chance, and were not disposed to give up their claims to the stoutest Beauvillian there.

"Thank you, Lotty," said they, "that is much better than kissing Milly's baby. Now you are our sister, and we are entitled to a fair share of brotherly salutes."

"Come, boys," said Basil, "if you don't make way for us to get out of this crush, I shall stop all your privileges for a year to come. I think I had better take you up in my arms, my wife, my darling! and carry you out."

"No, no, indeed, that you shall not," said Lotty, indignantly.

Brian and Hugh proved themselves good bridegroomsmen, and by dint of their exertions, the bride and bridegroom had way made for them to their carriage. Then Basil strewed handfuls of silver, and, taking advantage of the rush, he placed Lotty in the carriage, and sprang in after her.

"Now," he said, clasping her close, "mine forever."

But the joy and hilarity of everybody rose to such a pitch, and the little bride showed such fluctuating spirits, that Lord Erlscourt privately ordered his carriage round an hour before the time appointed.

As Lotty appeared in her dark-green travelling dress, her little straw bonnet, with white ribbons and violet flowers, the handsome chariot, with its four gray steeds and smart postboys, who had all six been laying themselves up in lavender for the last month, to come out prancing and gay on this particular occasion, drove up to the door — it certainly was

"One touch to her hand,
One word in her ear;"

for, without one word, without an adieu, Basil lifted his wife into the carriage, jumped in after her, the steps were up, the door shut, the magic words, "all right!" said, and away bounded the carriage, — with the servant clinging behind, and Bear careering his best after it, a great favor hanging over one ear — just as if they were all impelled out of sight by four express engines.

The amiable Beauvillians were dumb-struck, and only Brian and Hugh had wits remaining to throw an old shoe, for luck, after the fast receding carriage. But at least they had seen Lord Erlscourt's face as he sat down by his darling, his bride, his wife. At all events, they had heard the tones of his voice, as he turned to her, and said, —

"My wife, now my own Lotty!"

And so, feeling that they had done a good deed that day; that they had seen, by their girl's face, that she was happy; they resorted to the only thing left them, namely, to shake hands with each other, and indulge in boundless self-congratulations.

This they continued to do without cessation and with renewed vigor, commencing again and again, when word was passed that everybody must prepare for dancing. So rooms were cleared, the band — or bands — sent for, gloves tried on, lamps lighted, and everything in a high state of commencement by seven or eight o'clock.

The gentle, stately Margaret was borne off in the powerful grasp of a mighty Beauvillian, and found herself flying, with resistless speed, down the long rows of a good, old-fashioned country dance.

The dignified old Lady Katherine was in the strong hands of another Beauvillian, and was seen bobbing up and down, out of all tune and place, but intensely delighted and happy.

Mrs. Laird, spite of her strict Scotch notions, found herself panting and breathless at the bottom of forty couples, without ever having been able to bring in a word of remonstrance at the extraordinary and wonderful position in which she was placed.

The pretty Miss Erles, one with a most devoted partner, and the dark, but still handsome-looking mother, met at all corners, all turning of hands, and setting of partners; while, as for Brian and Hugh, they only reached the bottom of the long country dance, to bow to their late partner, and snatch a new one, and rush up to the top to begin again. Mrs. Bankes and the 'Squire, and Mr. Bankes and Mrs. Royston, were to be met everywhere; and Dr. Laird finding it impossible to keep his wig on in the respectable state of rectitude that Mrs. Laird deemed proper, had at last thrown it off altogether, and was to be seen with rubicund face and shining bald head in every direction. Even the little, fair, tiny twins, under the able superintendence of their delighted father, were performing a sort of extemporaneous dance of his and their concoction, in a remote corner.

After an alarming quantity of dancing, there was supper, and after supper speeches, in which every Beauvillian assured every other person this was the happiest day of their lives; and every other person cordially agreed.

Then ensued such mutual compliments, such reciprocity of sentiments, such a chorus of praises and interchange of good wishes, that every man supposed, and every lady, too, that they were sitting next to the dearest friend they had in the world, save and except the bride and bridegroom.

Then dancing commenced again, fast and furious. Margaret and Lady Katherine were the first to retire; but, lo! it had sounded five of the clock ere Mrs. Laird could tear herself away — in fact, she would have deemed it rank heresy to the honor of the day had she given in sooner than any of the others.

Wearily she crawled up stairs, shocked to see daylight beginning to peep through the shutters; and, as she tied on a nightcap of vast frills and long winding strings, thus she discoursed to the good doctor, who had discreetly gone to bed an hour ago; but was possessed with a vague, uneasy notion that he had left his wig under the stairs.

"Ech, doctor! but these are wonderful folk. They started i' the morn afore the first meal a shaking hands, and wad ye believe it, they are aye at it the noo, at this awfu' hour of night, or if I spak God's truth, the morn o' anither day; what wi' dancing, jigging, and shaking hands, I am amaist dune. I ne'er thought to gang on i' this fashion at ony time of my life, least ways the noo, and me just o' the stroke o' threescore. But they wadna be refused; one was aye o' the floor, jigging awa wi' ane of them stout fine auld gentlemen, and no to hear a word of 'will ye, nill ye.' Aye me. The doctor's no minding me, he's just fast like any baby, and nae wonder. More betoken I kenned he was a bit unsteady, and there's nae doubt but he has a hail bottle under his belt. And hoo I am to ca' shame on him i' the morn is past ma kenning, for deed it was nae mair nor respectful an proper of him to glorify the day."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

Carry was sitting by her fire, also prepared for bed, about the same hour that Mrs. Laird delivered the last sentiment; she was far from tired or sleepy — on the contrary, deeply buried in thought, when Flo. burst into the room.

"It is shameful the way in which Fred. behaves! He will not come to bed, though I am as tired as a dog; and just as I get into a nice sleep, he will be rattling up, making such a noise; — but what are you sitting here for, instead of getting into bed?"

"I am waiting to rub Robert's shoulder. We could not bring his man, and ever since his accident, the doctor ordered it to be rubbed with White's oils."

"Mighty conjugal, indeed! He might have let you off this one night."

"Of course he would; but he has been so kind to me, I wait at my own wish."

"Well, I do hope, Carry, you will regard what I tell you, and think less of your babies and more of him."

Carry smiled.

"A man that can go and give his wife, in one day, four or five beautiful dresses, and scores of other things besides, is not to be despised; mark my words, Carry."

"Flo., I smiled to think of your ever having given me such advice — I don't remember it. But I wished to speak to you. The last three days have made me think more than I ever did before, Flo."

"It is high time you should begin to regard something besides those brats."

"Do you notice Mrs. Frank, with those darling little twins, Flo.?"

"I must allow they are very pretty, nice, little, well-behaved children."

"Do you see how she puts their papa forward in everything, making them love and respect him as the first of human beings, though he is so distractedly fond of them?"

"He would spoil them past everything, but for her, Carry; it is lucky she has no more — I don't think he would have eyes for any other child."

"True, and that shows how judicious she is. Do you remember how we laughed at and despised the poor Misses Leigh, for being odd old maids? and now how different they are."

"Fred. said he never saw such a well-managed house as Mr. Frank's; and did you taste the curry? — even Pierre could make nothing like it."

"And to see Mr. Grey with his wife; no wonder, Flo., I sit here and think."

"Well, live and learn, Carry. I am delighted to find that, at last, you take counsel by me."

"I beg your pardon, Flo.," answered Carry, with spirit; "so far from taking your counsel, I have been calling to mind a conversation I once had with you. Do you remember the avenue at Court Leigh? You and I were there, and poor Augusta. Ah, Flo.! whenever I think of that fine, handsome girl, and her sade fate, I cannot but weep."

"Very ridiculous of you! she fully deserved it."

"Why, Flo., I have been thinking you and I have not conducted ourselves much better."

"Speak for yourself, if you please," answered Flo., in high indignation.

"Then I say this: on that day on which we walked up and down the avenue, you compared Augusta, yourself, and me with Millicent, Margaret, and Lotty. I agreed with you in thinking, not only that they were sadly to be pitied, but owed much of their fate to their own folly. And we all three agreed, poor Augusta, you, and I, that we would not change places with them; and now, Flo., within these three days, within this hour, I have been wishing I was even as good as Mrs. Frank."

"And a very proper thing, too," interrupted Flo.

"Augusta died a horrible death," continued Carry; "and you, Flo., can you still say you are better than the three schoolfellows we despised? Do you think your husband loves you as he ought? or that he will continue to pay you even due respect — (pray don't be impatient with me) — if you go on in your present habits? All his family dislike you, and think you are the real cause of the troubles he has fallen into; and you know, Flo., there is more truth in that ——"

"And, pray, what do you think of your own precious self?" interrupted Flo., in her hottest mood.

"I shall have nothing to say for myself, if I do not take timely warning. Indeed, I shudder when I reflect that, but for this visit, but for Lotty's fortunate wedding, my eyes might never have been opened, I might have alienated dear Robert forever."

"Truly, a most wonderful loss ——"

"Do not be angry, Flo.; I feel sure you must reflect, when we compare our situations now. Millicent, as ever, retains a place in the estimation of all who know her, that none can envy her, she so truly deserves it. And Lotty, Flo. ——"

"Lotty was always unlike any one else," allowed Flo., rather pettishly.

"What a vast amount of love have we seen poured out upon our little child-schoolfellow! so spontaneously bestowed, does it not speak and say, 'None more worthy?' But, Margaret! — ah, Flo.! who can look at her, and not wish to be better? With a stricken look in her eyes, with her heart half in heaven, how she still treads the earth among us, our queen and head. Her grief is not selfish, though so great, for how gently does she interest herself in all our concerns. She said I was very good to come, and leave my children; and, smiling, added, that I should be pleased to see the difference a few days made in them. No advice, Flo., no hints, but this little remark, to remove (I know she thought) any pain I might have for doing so. And you, Flo., when Mr. Bankes was complaining yesterday of the long time you kept him waiting, she spoke for you as one sister would speak of another, and your husband listened, and thought kindly of you then, Flo., for none can gainsay the saintlike Margaret. Though she has lost her Harold, and will carry to her grave a riven heart, yet who would not wish to be her? And as that cannot be, Flo., it seems next best to me that we should begin a good deed on Lotty's wedding day, with God's help — a deed that Lotty will herself love and foster. It is, so to act that we may prove worthy to have been

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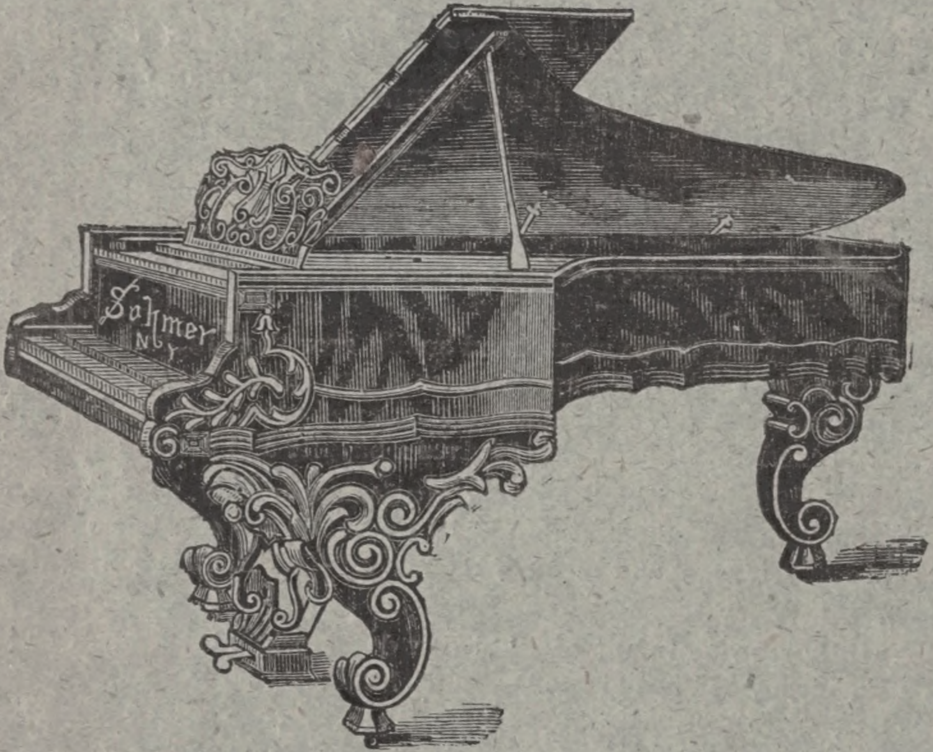

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